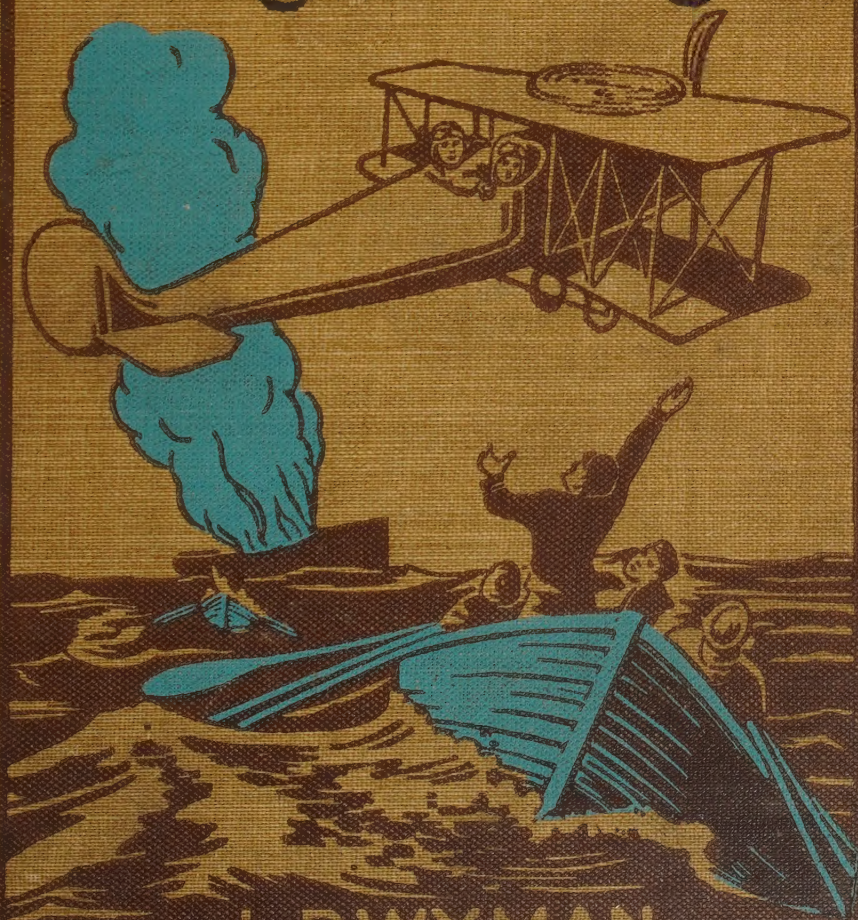


The Hunniwell Boys' Longest Flight



L.P.WYMAN


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To John

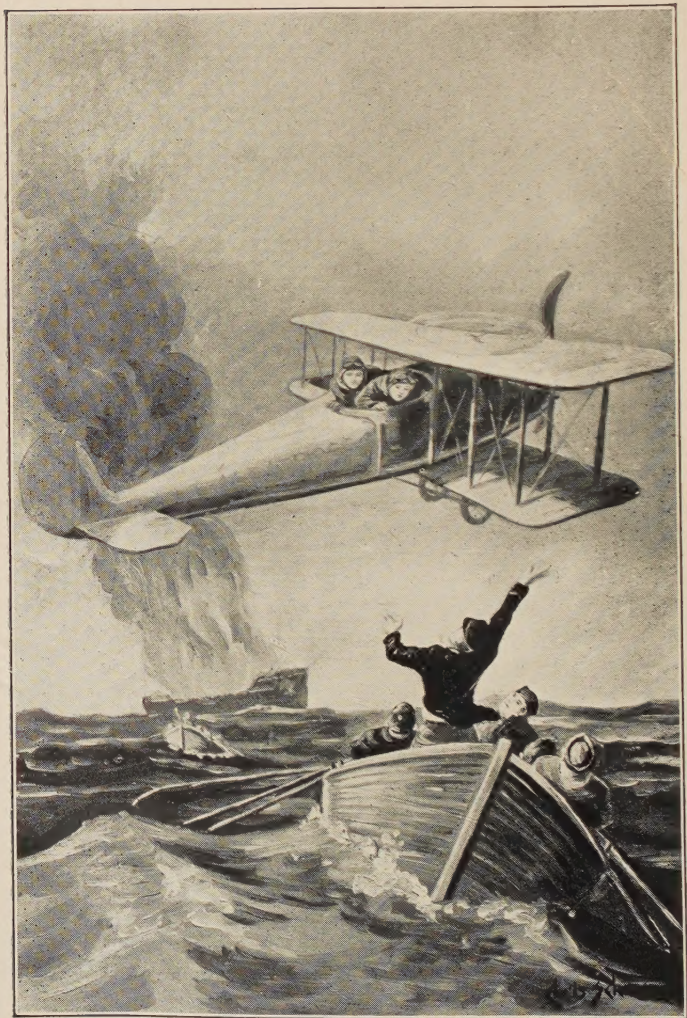
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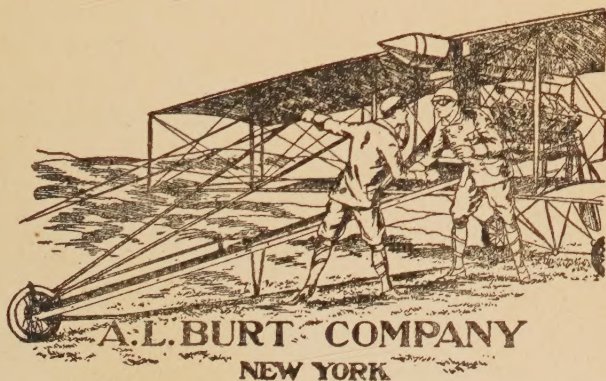
"You can hunt up a boat and tell the Captain to come to our rescue," the man shouted back.
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THE HUNNIWELL BOYS' LONGEST FLIGHT

By L. P. WYMAN, Ph.D.

AUTHOR OF

"The Hunniwell Boys in the Air," "The Hunniwell Boys' Victory," "The Hunniwell Boys and the Platinum Mystery," "The Hunniwell Boys in the Secret Service," "The Lake-wood Boys Series," "The Golden Boys Series," etc.



Printed in U. S. A.

The Hunniwell Boys Series

THRILLING AVIATION STORIES
FOR BOYS 12 TO 16 YEARS

By L. P. WYMAN, Ph. D.

The Hunniwell Boys in the Air
The Hunniwell Boys' Victory
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The Hunniwell Boys' Longest Flight

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THE HUNNIWELL BOYS' LONGEST FLIGHT

CHAPTER I.

A LONG HOP PROPOSED

"Is *THE Chum* running all right, Bill?"

The speaker, a man just under middle age, was standing at the end of the wharf and it was evident that he was more than a little excited.

Bill Hunniwell and his brother, Gordon, had just finished a job of rewiring certain parts of the electrical equipment of the motor boat and both looked up quickly at the question.

"Sure she is, Mr. Stokes. What's wrong?" Bill replied.

"Something must have happened to the *Aloma*," the man told him. "S. B. went up around Mosquito Point more than half an hour ago and he hasn't come back. You know he never runs her but a short distance beyond the point and——"

"Probably he's having trouble with that timer

again," Gordon interrupted. "I told him the other day that it needed a new one."

"And he sent for one, but——"

"We'll take a run up around the point and see what's keeping him," Bill broke in. "Want to go along?"

"I can't. The curtain goes up in five minutes and I'm in the first act," the man told him.

"We'll get him all right," Bill called after him as the actor turned toward the shore. "Everything all right, Gordon?"

"Right as cream. Just a minute till I cast off. All right now."

Bill pushed over the switch as Gordon jumped back into the boat and the *Chum* backed noiselessly away from the wharf. The boat, the property of Bob and Jack Gordon, had been loaned to the Hunniwell boys while the owners were abroad. It was equipped with a powerful electric motor run by one of their cells which they had invented some time since, and was capable of making thirty miles an hour with ease.

"Wonder if S. B. has any of the company on board?" Bill said as he swung the bow of the boat around and headed toward the point some two miles distant.

"Didn't notice when he started out," Gordon told

him. "If he has, the show'll have to wait till they get back, but probably he hasn't or Ned would have said something about it."

"Probably."

The *Chum* was now cutting through the water at a twenty-five mile an hour clip, throwing the spray in a wide swarth on either side of the bow. It was just past eight o'clock and the sun was setting directly ahead of them, painting the sky with brilliant colors.

"Some sunset!" Gordon declared, pointing toward the sky.

"I'll say," Bill agreed.

"Look, Bill, they're stuck on Moll Rock sure's you're born," Gordon cried a moment later as the boat swung around the point.

"Well, what d'you know about that? I told S. B. he ought to put a buoy on that rock."

Moll Rock was a little less than a half mile from the point and, almost before he had finished speaking, Bill was slowing down and a moment later brought the *Chum* alongside.

"Looks as though you'd hit something," Gordon declared as he caught hold of the rail of the *Aloma*, a handsome speed boat some twenty-five feet long.

Mr. S. B. Cramp, the owner of the boat, was a man of wealth, who had for many years made his

summer home at Lakewood and the boat was a new one, having been put in the lake that summer. He was about fifty years of age and a great friend of the Hunniwell boys and, for that matter, of everyone who lived in the grove.

"Can you beat it?" he demanded. "Tiller rope broke and before I could stop her she struck. As luck would have it I was about to turn and had slowed down or I reckon she'd have gone right over it."

"And ripped her bottom out," Bill suggested.

"Probably. But I don't believe she's hurt a bit. You know this rock's pretty smooth on top. Think you can pull us off?"

"We'll have a try at it," Bill told him. "But you're up pretty far."

There were only three others besides Mr. Cramp on the boat and they were all men. In a few minutes Bill had turned the *Chum* and backed her up to within a few feet of the *Aloma's* stern. A rope was soon fastened fast to the *Chum* and Bill pushed over the switch.

"Better get in the stern, all of you," Gordon called as the rope tightened.

The *Chum* was a powerful boat for its size but the *Aloma* was heavy and, as Bill had said, she had run well up on the rock, and he doubted his boat's

ability to pull her off. And his doubts were well founded as events proved. Over to the last notch he pushed the switch and the propeller was churning the water into foam and still the boat did not move.

"Guess we'll have to get them all in our boat" Gordon suggested as Bill shut off the power. "That'll lighten her some."

"We'll try it," Bill agreed as he backed up slowly. "Perhaps if you all get in here she'll come off," he told them.

The transfer was speedily accomplished and once more Bill started the motor.

"She's coming," Mr. Cramp shouted as Bill put the switch on last notch.

It was a tight squeeze, as Gordon put it, but inch by inch the larger boat gave way and fifteen minutes later was once more floating free.

"Good boy," Mr. Cramp cried as he wrung Bill's hand. "Guess we'd have had to spend the night here if you hadn't come after us."

"Glad we could do it" Bill assured him. "I sure hope the *Aloma* isn't hurt."

"I don't believe she is. She didn't ship a drop of water while she was on the rock."

"Then I reckon she's all right."

Mr. Cramp and his friends got back into the

Aloma and, after a hasty examination, announced that there was no sign of a leak. "All I've got to say is that I'm lucky," Mr. Cramp smiled.

"Indeed you are," Gordon assured him. "It isn't everyone who can run onto a rock and not get banged up."

"He'll remember that as long as he lives," Bill said a few minutes later after the *Aloma* had started back.

"And think he owes us a debt he never can pay," Gordon laughed.

"Oh, he'll soon find some way to pay us back. Anyhow he's the salt of the earth."

"One of the finest."

When the boys entered their cottage half an hour later they found their mother talking with a friend of the family, a Mrs. Green, who had a cottage just on the other side of the grove. They noticed that there were tears in her eyes and suspected the reason. A little more than a year had passed since her son, a boy of fifteen, had ran away from home and had shipped on a vessel from Boston bound for Australia. No word had been received from him since and they knew that she was living in constant hope of his return.

"No word from Fred?" Bill asked after they had shaken hands.

He knew that she liked to talk about him and that it comforted her somewhat.

"Not a word. Bill," she told him," and it's been more than a year since he went. I—I'm afraid he's dead."

"Nonsense, Fred's all right and he'll be turning up one of these days safe and sound."

"I wish I could think so," she smiled sadly.

It was while they were undressing that night that the thought struck Bill.

"Gordon, do you suppose Fred Green will ever come back?" he asked.

"Sure he will."

"But, you know, they learned that he deserted the ship at Australia and that was almost a year ago."

"When do we start?"

"Eh?"

"You heard me the first time."

"But who said anything about starting for anywhere?"

"Cut it out. I can read you like a book."

"You mean you think you can."

"Think nothing. You are planning for us to take a trip in the plane to Australia to find Fred Green. Right?"

"Well, er—"

"I knew it. Believe me, I'm some mind reader."

"All right, have it your own way. What do you think of the idea?"

"Suits me."

"I really think we ought to go. Mrs. Green has always been mighty good to us and—"

"It's up to us to find Fred if we can," Gordon finished.

"That's what I was thinking."

"And you were thinking a mighty good think if you inquire from me."

"I thought you'd see it that way."

"How far away is Australia?"

"Wait a minute till I look it up in the atlas. It's some hop all right."

He got the atlas and soon found the right place. "Let's see now, it's a little less than three thousand miles to the coast. Then it's twenty-one hundred to Molokai and about five thousand more from there to Australia. How much does that make altogether?"

"Most ten thousand miles," Gordon told him.

"Some hop, eh?"

"I'll tell the world."

"A hundred hours at a hundred miles an hour."

"Just about."

"Or a little more than four days."

"But we can make better time than that."

"Sure we can, but I was giving us plenty of leeway. We ought to make it in three, I'd say."

"Easy."

"If nothing happens."

"Which brings me back to my original question, when do we start?"

"How about Tuesday? Tomorrow's Sunday."

"Tuesday is right."

The next morning at breakfast they broached the subject of the expedition to their parents.

"I thought we were going to have you boys at home for the rest of the summer," Mr. Hunniwell said.

"I thought so, too," Bill told him. "But don't you think we ought to try it? If you say no that'll be the end of it, of course."

"What do you think?" Mr. Hunniwell asked, turning to his wife.

"I, too, hoped they would stay here the rest of the summer," she smiled. "But I know that if my boy were lost away off there I would want someone to go and try to find him, and——"

"That's the way to talk," Gordon interrupted. "Of course it's our duty to go. Don't you say so, Father?"

"I suppose it is," his father smiled, and so the matter was settled.

"As if we could do anything else," Bill told Gordon a few minutes later as they were walking over to tell Mrs. Green what they had decided.

"God bless you dear boys," was all she could say after they had told her their plans.

"We'll find him if he's there," Gordon promised her.

"And bring him back to you," Bill added.

Monday was a busy day for the boys. They went down to the house in Skowhegan early in the morning and spent the first three hours giving the *Albatross* a thorough overlooking. The *Albatross* was an airplane which they had built and equipped with a powerful electric motor run by one of the same type of cell which they used in the motor boat. The absence of the usual heavy gasoline engine and the light construction of the plane made it very much lighter than an ordinary plane. The boys had taken advantage of this and had equipped it with a second motor which operated a horizontal propeller by means of which they were able to lift it vertically into the air.

"Bill, how about making it a non-stop flight?" Gordon asked while they were still busy examining

every wire and making sure that every connection was tight.

"Ten thousand miles?"

"Why not? We can carry power enough for a hundred thousand."

"But——"

"But what?" Gordon demanded as Bill hesitated.

"Nothing, only that's most twice as far as anyone has ever flown without stopping."

"What's that got to do with it? No objection to breaking a few records, is there?"

"I suppose not, only that's an awful ways to fly."

"But it's safe," Gordon insisted. "It isn't as if we had only the one propeller to depend on."

"I know, and I guess it's safe enough."

"Then we'll do it?"

"We'll try it."

"Well, try never was beaten, you know," Gordon smiled. "And far be it from us to break the record."

There were a thousand and one things to do and the day passed quickly and, almost before they realized it, supper time arrived. They were tired, but everything was ready for the start in the morning. Sleep was slow in coming to them that night as they were keyed up to a high tension in anticipation of the great adventure. But finally they drifted off

after counting innumerable flocks of sheep jumping over fences.

Morning dawned bright and clear, and after a hearty breakfast, they were ready for the start.

"Send us a cable as soon as you get there," Mr. Hunniwell said as he shook hands with them.

"Sure thing," Bill told him.

"But don't worry if you don't get it right on time," Gordon added.

"If I was one of the worrying kind I'd have been in an insane hospital long before this," his father laughed.

"But you will be careful, won't you?" Mrs. Hunniwell urged as she kissed them warmly.

"We certainly will," both boys promised, and a moment later the *Albatross* rose majestically into the air and turned her nose toward the West.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE AIR

"THAT motor is sure running mighty sweet," Gordon declared as Bill pushed the switch over another notch.

"You bet," he agreed. "We're hitting close to a hundred and fifty and I've got two notches left.

"Better keep her there for a while."

"Right."

They were passing over the city of Portland about a hundred miles from home and were flying at an altitude of five thousand feet. The day was perfect, and what little wind there was, was in their favor, so they both felt that the trip had started most auspiciously. Not a sound was to be heard save the soft purr of the motor, and that was hardly audible, so quietly did it run. It was late in August and at that altitude there was just enough tang to the air to make it exhilarating.

"Gee, but this is great," Gordon sighed as he

stretched out his legs as far as the space would permit.

"It's the grasshopper's knuckles," Bill laughed.

"Where'd you get the expression?"

"Coined it. How do you like it?"

"Rotten, if you inquire from me. Honestly, Bill, you've got to cut out the slang before it gets too strong a hold on you. You're using too much of it lately"

"You mean I would be if I used as much as you do."

"Nothing of the sort. You use a lot more'n I do, and that's a fact."

Bill had spent some time the night before charting his course and he was now steering wholly by compass.

"We don't go very near the Hawaiian Islands, do we?" Gordon asked.

"No," Bill told him, "we'd be going a good bit out of our way if we did. We'll slip over the edge of the United States at about the upper part of the Gulf of California, then we won't see much of anything except drink until we get there."

When they ate their lunch at noon they estimated that they had covered about six hundred miles, as they had started a little before eight o'clock and

had been holding closely to a speed of one hundred and fifty miles an hour.

"That must be Cincinnati ahead there," Gordon said as he finished eating.

"If this compass doesn't lie, that's what it is," Bill told him.

The weather had continued all that they could have wished until about the middle of the afternoon, when a low-lying bank of clouds ahead warned them that they might run into a shower. A half hour later and there was no doubt of it.

"Better jump it," Gordon advised.

"Or land," Bill added.

"But we can't do that without spoiling the non-stop part of it."

"I know, but we promised we'd be careful."

"But there's no danger in jumping over it, provided the jumping's good."

"Well, we'll try it and see how it looks up there," Bill said as he gave the stick a pull.

Up higher and higher they climbed until the altimeter registered fourteen thousand feet, when Bill straightened it out. Down below them they could see the heavy billows of dark clouds rolling in majestic curves, while every now and then a flash of lighting would stab its way through their midst and the deep rumble of thunder broke the silence.

But up there where they were all was bright sunlight.

"The jumping was good all right," Gordon chuckled.

"Good as gold," Bill added. "But I sure would hate to be down there. That's some storm, if you ask me."

A few minutes later and the storm had passed from beneath them, and Bill brought the plane down to the five thousand foot level. They had arranged the space back of their seats so that by curling up a bit one could sleep with some degree of comfort, and, shortly after they had eaten supper, Bill turned the wheel over to Gordon and climbed back into what they called the bedroom. It had been arranged that he should sleep until twelve o'clock, when Gordon would take his turn.

There was no moon, and an hour after Bill had gone to sleep there was no light save that which the stars afforded. But it was light in the cockpit and Gordon had no trouble in keeping the plane on its course. The hours dragged by very slowly, and more than once he wished that they did not need to sleep, it was so lonesome. But twelve o'clock came at last and he decided that he would wait a bit longer before calling Bill. But the plan did not work, for Bill was one of those who could always awake at

any specified time, and two minutes after the hour he climbed back into the cockpit.

"Thought you'd give me an extra hour, eh?" he chuckled.

"Well, I'm not sleepy, at least not very," Gordon exclaimed.

"You crawl back there and I'll bet you'll be bye-bye in less than a minute."

It was shortly after eleven o'clock the next forenoon when they caught sight of the ocean, and a half hour later they were over the water. Everything had worked perfectly about the plane and they were in high spirits, knowing that they were well ahead of their schedule. A half hour later and the last vestige of land had disappeared behind them and, as Gordon put it, there was nothing but water beneath them and sky above.

"Somehow a fellow feels kind of small up here," he declared.

"It's because there's so much room, I reckon," Bill said as he began setting out the lunch.

About the middle of the afternoon Bill called attention to the fact that they were slowing up, and almost as soon as he had made the statement the propeller stopped.

"Snap on the elevator," he called and Gordon

quickly threw over the switch which controlled the elevating propeller.

Fortunately they were up about seven thousand feet when it happened, for their speed had slowed down so much that the plane was falling rapidly before they got the elevator started, and they were only a few hundred feet from the water when it halted the fall.

"Gee, but that was a bit too close for yours truly," Gordon gasped. "If we had been flying at the regular five thousand we'd have had a bath."

"We should have slipped a new cell in before," Bill told him. "I reckon that's what's the trouble."

He was right, for by this time he had replaced the cell with a fresh one and the motor started at once.

"That cell couldn't have been full," he declared. "It should have gone farther than this. Are you sure you put a fresh one in when we started?"

"Sure I am."

"Well, we must be more careful in the future. We'll put in a new one every twenty-five hundred miles. We've got plenty of them and there's no sense in taking a chance."

It was about an hour later when Gordon, who was looking through a powerful field glass, called

Bill's attention to an object so far away that to him it appeared a mere speck on the water.

"That ship's making a powerful lot of smoke," he declared.

"I can't see any smoke," Bill replied.

"Take a squint through the glass."

"Now I see it."

"What do you make of it?"

"Too far away."

The ship was directly ahead of them and was rapidly becoming more plainly visible and in a few minutes Gordon declared that it was on fire.

"Are you sure?" Bill asked anxiously.

"Look for yourself," and he again handed the glass to Bill.

"You're right, it is on fire," Bill agreed after a hasty glance.

Bill, as he spoke, gave the stick a slight pull and the nose of the plane dipped a few degrees. A few minutes and they could see that the ship was a large steamer and that the fire was beyond control, although it was confined to the forward part.

"Gee, Bill, and we can't do a thing to help," Gordon groaned as Bill slowed down the motor.

"Looks like a freighter."

"It is, and that means that there aren't very many

on board, but we couldn't take them off if there were only two."

"They're taking to the boats," cried Bill.

By the time the plane was over the ship all the crew were in the small boats and were rowing away. The ship was now a furnace of flame and smoke and was burning like tinder. There were four of the small boats and they held about a dozen men each and, as the plane hovered over them at a height of about two hundred feet, they saw a man in one of them who was frantically trying to attract their attention.

Bill allowed the plane to settle slowly until it was within fifty or sixty feet of the boat, where he brought it to a standstill.

"Anything we can do for you?" he shouted, leaning over the side of the cockpit.

"You can hunt up a boat and tell the Captain to come to our rescue," the man shouted back.

"Didn't you get anyone by wireless?" Bill asked him.

"Wireless went out of commission just before the fire started."

"I see. Can you tell me in which direction we'll be most likely to sight a ship?" asked Bill.

"One's good's another, I reckon. Where you bound for?"

"Australia."

"In that plane?"

"Sure," Bill smiled.

"Well, I'll be blowed. Your name Lindbergh?"

"No."

"Well, will you see if you can send help to us? It's a mighty long row from here to shore."

"Certainly we will. What's your position?"

"Latitude twenty-three degrees fifty minutes and longitude about one hundred and twenty-two."

"Right. We'll hunt till we find someone," Bill promised. "Good luck to you."

"Same to you," the man shouted as Bill started the forward propeller.

"Now you make good use of the glass and don't miss a thing," he ordered.

"You bet. Which way you going?"

"Might's well keep on our course for a while. He said we'd be as likely to strike one in one direction as in another. Of course if we don't sight one in about an hour we'll circle."

Thirty minutes passed and then an hour and they had sighted nothing, and Bill was on the point of turning when Gordon suddenly announced that he saw something.

"About two points to the left," he cried, and Bill gave the wheel a slight turn. "It's a steamer," he

declared a moment later. "Keep her just as she is."

A few minutes later and they could see that the ship was coming toward them. It was a large steamer and smoke pouring from two stacks indicated that it was coming full speed ahead.

"Passenger boat," Gordon declared.

Bill nodded in reply as he turned the wheel a bit to the right. "We'll have to come up from behind," he explained.

As they passed the ship at a distance of a few hundred feet they could see that many of the passengers were watching them. Then, as soon as they were a short distance behind, Bill circled, and a few minutes later was keeping pace with the steamer and only a few yards from its side.

"We've got a message for the Captain," Gordon shouted.

"I'm he," shouted back a man in uniform who was standing on the bridge."

"Can you hear me?" Gordon asked.

"Yes," was the reply.

Bill guided the plane a little nearer and Gordon told him what had happened and gave him the position of the burning ship.

"I'll pick them up," the Captain promised. "But who are you?"

"Bill and Gordon Hunniwell," Gordon told him.

"I've heard of you and your plane. Won the transcontinental race, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"That the plane?"

"This is it."

"Where are you bound for now?"

"Australia."

"Hope you make it."

"Thanks."

Bill now turned the wheel and, as the plane swung away from the ship, a mighty cheer went up from the passengers, to which they replied with a wave of the hand.

"Well, that job didn't delay us very long," Bill declared as the *Albatross* once more headed toward the distant goal.

"Hope he does as he said he would," Gordon remarked.

"He wouldn't dare do anything else with all those passengers on board. Not that I have any idea he would want to, of course, but it'll be all right."

"Of course it will. I was only talking to hear myself."

That night they divided into three-hour turns, as both agreed that was as long as they cared to face the loneliness of the night. Perhaps nowhere in the world is one so much alone as when in an airship

five to ten thousand feet above the ocean. To be sure, there were two of them, and when they were both awake they never thought of being lonely. But when one was asleep the other might almost as well have been alone, but by making the shifts only three hours long they did not mind it so much, although, as Gordon put it, the last fifteen minutes were longer than all the rest of the time put together.

When finally the first gray streaks in the east betokened the beginning of another day, Bill estimated that they had covered not less than sixty-five hundred miles.

"And we've still got something like thirty-five hundred to go?" Gordon asked.

"I don't believe it's quite so far as that," Bill told him. "We figured the distance by the way of the Hawaiian Islands, and, coming in a straight line, we've cut off some of that."

Late that afternoon they passed over several small islands and knew that they were getting, as Bill put it, on the last leg of their flight. But, shortly after they had eaten supper, they met an experience which very nearly brought the flight to a sudden and disastrous end. Gordon was putting the things away when Bill called his attention to something about a mile off to their right.

"What in the world is that?" he gasped.

"Search me," Gordon replied, picking up the glass. "It's a water spout," he declared a minute later.

"And it looks to me as though it's coming right after us."

"Better put on a bit more speed. It'll never catch us."

But just as Bill pushed the switch over another notch the motor, without the slightest warning, went dead. Instantly he switched on the other motor and the elevator started spinning, but the water spout was bearing down on them with the speed of an express, and although Bill turned the wheel to the left, the plane had slowed down to such an extent that it had but little effect. The spout, which was now only a short distance from them, appeared to be all of a hundred feet high and not less than twenty feet in diameter. Had they been flying at their usual elevation all would have been well, but they had just passed over an island, the largest they had seen so far, and Bill had brought the plane down to within a short distance of it in order that they might see it more closely, and at the moment the plane was only a very short distance above the water.

"It's going to hit us," Bill shouted.

"Sure as guns," Gordon gasped.

And it seemed that nothing could save them, for,

although the plane was now rising, it was not going up fast enough. They gazed as though fascinated at the column of water which was now almost upon them. Then, when both had given themselves up for lost, the spout seemed to give a sudden twist, which slightly changed its course, and with a terrific roar it swept by them with only a few feet to spare.

"Talk about your close calls," Gordon gasped.

"It was a miracle," Bill told him.

Without another word they bowed their heads, while the plane ascended, and each knew what the other was doing.

"Wire must have broken or come loose," Bill said as he slowed the elevator a bit. "See if you can find it while I hold her. It must be a wire, as we put in a new cell only a couple of hours ago."

Fortunately the broken wire was discovered after a moment's search and soon it was repaired and they were off again.

"We ought to be sighting the big island some time tomorrow. hadn't we?" Gordon asked as they were eating supper that night. "Between you and me and the fence post, I'm getting a bit fed up on our bill of fare."

"Same here," Bill smiled, "but it might be a whole lot worse."

"Well, maybe, though I don't just see how unless it was to have nothing at all."

"Which I fancy would be fatal with you in mighty short order."

"Well, I notice you're usually ready for your three squares a day," Gordon retorted.

CHAPTER III.

BALLOON CHASING

As soon as it was light the following morning, Gordon was on the watch for the first glimpse of their destination, although Bill assured him that they would hardly make it before noon. Small islands were constantly in sight and several times he declared that he could see Australia only to find a few minutes later that it was a much smaller island.

"Looks as though someone had a few islands to spare and had sprinkled them around the ocean in this locality," Gordon declared as they passed over a fair-sized one shortly before ten o'clock.

"We've seen a lot of them, and that's no mistake," Bill agreed. "But, unless I'm very much mistaken, there's your old island ahead there."

Gordon quickly caught up the glass and a moment later declared that there was no doubt about it. A half hour later and they were flying over the land which stretched ahead of them as far as they could see. But they knew they were still five or six hun-

dred miles from the place where they were to land. They had learned that the ship on which Fred Green had sailed had been bound for Sidney, and that city was their destination. But they were thrilled with the thought that they were so near the end of their trip and that, even were they to land before reaching the city, they would have set a new record for a non-stop flight by a good margin.

So they were obliged to eat one more meal in the air and, strange to relate, Gordon did not grumble over the fare, which, to say the least, was more than a little stale. Just before two o'clock he announced that he could see the city, and a half hour later they were flying low, looking for a good place to land. Although they knew that Sydney, together with its suburbs, was a city of upwards of eight hundred thousand, they were surprised at the area it encompassed.

"Gee, but I never realized they made them so big away off here," Gordon declared.

"Australia is a pretty big island," Bill told him. "Nearly three million square miles to it."

"Which means that we have about as much chance of finding Fred as we would have of finding a certain snowflake up in Maine in the winter time."

"Well, we knew all that before we started."

"Sure we did, but that looks like a good place to land, right down in that field."

The plane had been moving along at a speed of not more than twenty-five miles an hour, and, as Gordon spoke, Bill shut off the power and started the elevator, and five minutes later they leaped from the cockpit glad of the chance to stretch their legs. They had landed in a large open space which seemed to be a part of a large park, and only a few people were in sight.

"Doesn't seem to be any band out to greet us," Gordon grinned as he pranced about.

"For which we're mighty thankful," Bill returned. "Looks to me as though we'd landed quite a ways from the city proper."

"Maybe, but here comes a man who looks intelligent," Gordon said as he noted a man of middle age coming toward them.

The man, who introduced himself as Mr. John Burns, proved to be most pleasant and informed them that they had landed about six miles from the city proper, but that they were within the city limits. He expressed great surprise when they told him that they had come from the United States and was intensely interested in their story and in the plane, which they gladly showed him and explained how it worked.

"And you mean to tell me that you can go straight up in it?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, and come straight down," Bill told him.

"Wonderful."

"Can you tell us how far we are from a hotel where we can get something to eat?" Gordon asked.

"I can, but I won't," the man smiled. "I tell you what you're going to do. I live about a mile from here and you're going to be my guests for as long a time as you'll stay."

"But——"

"But nothing. See that spire off there? Well that belongs to a church, and my house is right opposite it. Can you run your plane along on the ground?"

"Sure we can, but——"

"Then you jump in and run it up there. You can stop when you come to the road and you'll be only a few steps from the house, and I'll have a couple of my men help you push it over to the garage. I've got a garage big enough to house it all right. If you get there before I do, wait for me," and he started off as fast as he could walk without giving them time to say another word.

"What do you think?" Bill asked as soon as the man was out of hearing.

"He seems all right to me," Gordon told him.

"Probably he is, only——"

"Oh, you're too suspicious. Come along, I'm hungry."

"That's strange," Bill grinned as he climbed into the cockpit.

They taxied across the field at a slow speed and soon reached the street. The man who had extended the invitation was nowhere in sight, but he drove up a moment later in an expensive car and told them to wait just a minute and he'd send a couple of men to help them with the plane. Several people stopped to gaze at the plane while they were waiting, and one or two asked the boys where they had come from. But it was only a few minutes before the two men appeared, and together they pushed the plane across the sidewalk and about a half a block up the street. Then they turned into the entrance of what appeared to be an extensive property.

"Guess he's all right if he owns this place," Bill whispered as they caught sight of the house, which had been hidden by large trees set in front of it.

"Gee, it's a palace," Gordon gasped.

Mr. Burns was waiting in the doorway of the

garage, which was situated about a hundred feet back of the house, and, with a bright smile, directed them where to put the plane. The garage was, as Gordon declared, as large as many public garages, and they noted that there were several fine cars in it.

"He must be a multimillionaire," Gordon whispered.

"Worse than that, I'd say," Bill whispered back. "Looks like we'd fallen into a soft spot all right."

"Now we'll go up to the house, and I reckon a good hot bath will be acceptable to you," Mr. Burns suggested.

They followed him into the house, which was richly but simply furnished. As they entered the living-room a woman, evidently a few years younger than the man, came forward to greet them. As they were introduced, she welcomed them with a smile which at once won them both.

"Where are the children?" Mr. Burns asked his wife.

"I believe they went to the movies," she told him.

"We've got two boys, twins, fourteen years old, and they'll just about eat you up when they find out what you've done," Mr. Burns told them. "By the way, how does it happen that the papers didn't get hold of it?"

"Well," Bill said, "we didn't let anyone but our folks and one or two others know what we were up to. You see, sir, we're here for a purpose, and we didn't want to be bothered with a crowd making a fuss over us."

"I see. Well, after you've rested a bit, perhaps you'll find I can be of some help to you—that is, if you care to tell me about it."

"Certainly we will," Bill assured him.

And an hour later, sitting on the porch, they told him the story. He said nothing until they had finished, then, with the smile which they had come to look for, he said:

"That's a pretty large order, it seems to me."

"We realize that, sir," Bill told him. "And we know that the chances are all against us, but we're going to do our best."

"And that's all anyone can do. Now, let me see. You say it was about a year ago that he came here?"

"Yes, sir, just about a year ago. It was in July, to be more exact."

"Do you know the name of the ship?"

"It was the *General Jackson*," Bill told him.

"*General Jackson*. I don't seem to place it. You see, I'm in the shipping business myself and know most of the vessels which come to this port, but—

just wait a minute till I call up a friend who'll know if that ship ever reached here."

He was gone about fifteen minutes, and when he returned he told them that the boat in question belonged to a concern called The Tropic Shipping Company.

"It's not a very large concern, but a good one," he explained. "I know the president slightly, and in the morning we'll go down there and see if we can pick up anything."

The boys tried to thank him, but he wouldn't have it, and just then a couple of boys bounded up the steps and stopped short as they saw Bill and Gordon.

"Well, well, so you're back," Mr. Burns greeted them. "And I've got the biggest surprise you ever had. These are my boys," he explained. "This is Edward and this is Fred. Boys, this is Gordon Hunniwell and this is Bill Hunniwell. Now hold yourselves tight. They have flown all the way here from the eastern part of the United States, a longer flight than has ever been made before. Now what do you think of that for a surprise?"

The twins proved to be, as Gordon afterward declared, regular fellows, and in less than five minutes after the introductions all four were fast

friends, and the story of the flight was being told all over again, the twins drinking in every word.

"And you expect you can find him?" Fred asked when the tale was finished.

"Well, we hope we can," Bill smiled.

"I'll bet you can do anything," Edward declared as he slid his hand into Bill's.

"I wish you were right," Bill told him. "But I'm afraid you've got too high an estimate of our ability."

"No, I haven't either," the boy insisted. "Anyone that can fly that far can do anything, and I don't mean maybe."

As soon as breakfast was over the next morning, Mr. Burns ordered his man to bring around one of the cars, and a few minutes later they were on the way to interview the president of The Tropic Shipping Company. They had gone about a half mile down the main street when they stopped for a moment to watch a carnival located in a lot just off the street. The feature which had attracted their attention was a large captive balloon floating at a distance of some hundred feet above the ground. In the balloon were a half-dozen children, and their joyous cries testified to the fun they were having.

"Those kiddies are having the time of their lives," Mr. Burns said.

"I'll say they are," Bill agreed.

Mr. Burns had ordered the man to drive on and the car had just started when they heard a shriek of horror, and, turning their heads, they saw that the balloon had broken away and was rapidly rising. On the ground, although there were but few grown people about, the greatest excitement prevailed. There was a strong breeze blowing toward the sea and it would be but a matter of minutes before the balloon would be out over the water.

"Those poor children," Mr. Burns gasped.

"Quick, sir, we must get back!" Bill cried.

"Back? Back where?" Mr. Burns asked.

"Back to the house," Bill shouted. "We must get the plane and go after them. We——"

"Back, quick, Joe, and never mind the speed laws," Mr. Burns ordered.

And the driver certainly, as Bill afterward declared, smashed every speed law that ever was made. As the big car ground to a stop in front of the garage, the boys were out and swinging open the doors, and in little more than a minute the *Albatross* was once more in the air.

"You'll get them, Bill," shouted one of the twins.

Bill started the forward propeller as soon as he saw they would clear the trees and turned the plane toward the sea. Not more than twenty minutes had

elapsed since the balloon broke away, but there was a thick haze in the air and, although Gordon searched the sky as the plane swept over the shore line, he could see nothing of their quarry.

"It can't be very far away," he told Bill as he took the glass from his eyes.

"Doesn't seem so," Bill agreed.

"If it wasn't for this haze we could probably see it all right, but I don't believe we can see more than half a mile."

"It was going up pretty fast, wasn't it?"

"Pretty fast, I'd say."

"Then I guess we'd better go up pretty high."

"You want to keep right with the wind," Gordon told him.

"I'm trying to."

Bill was climbing at a pretty sharp angle and the plane was making well over ninety miles an hour, but at the end of a half hour the balloon had not been sighted.

"We've missed it somehow," Gordon declared.

"Must have," Bill agreed as he swung the plane around in a wide area.

"I believe we're up too high and this haze is getting worse all the time. It's most a fog."

"Oh, if it would only clear up," Bill groaned as he dipped the nose of the plane.

It was true that the haze had gotten much worse and had thickened until they could see but a short distance. All sight of the land had disappeared some time ago and the plane seemed to be the only thing in the world.

"Better slow her down a bit," Gordon advised. "Maybe we'll hear them shouting."

Bill decreased their speed until they were making only forty miles an hour, and Gordon began to shout. But no answer reached them, and for another half hour they circled about, now increasing their altitude and again coming down to a lower level.

"Talk about hunting for a needle in a hay stack," Gordon said as Bill gave the stick a hard jerk. "Believe me, it's got nothing on this."

"But we've got to find them," Bill told him. "We're their only hope."

"We'll hunt till we do."

But the minutes passed and they made circle after circle and flew at altitudes varying from a few hundred feet to seven thousand, but not once did they catch sight of the fugitive balloon with its precious cargo. It was now nearly an hour and a half since they had taken the air and they had no idea how far from the land they had traveled. They

could not understand why they had not found it almost at once. The wind was not strong, not more than eighteen or twenty miles an hour, they judged, and the balloon could not have traveled very far in the short time it had taken them to return to the garage and get the plane into the air. But the fact remained that they had not found it.

"They might have let the gas out and come down," Gordon suggested.

"I doubt it," Bill told him. "They were too small to know enough for that, and, besides, balloons of that type seldom have a valve."

At the moment they were at an altitude of nearly seven thousand feet, although they both doubted if the balloon would reach the height owing to the decreased density of the air.

"I think we'd better stick to a lower level," Gordon said. "It's pretty light up here and they're more likely to be down lower."

"I know it," Bill agreed, nosing the plane downward. "Don't you think it's getting a bit clearer?" he asked a minute later.

"Seems to me it is," Gordon replied. "If it'll only get good and clear, we'll find them in short order."

A few minutes later there was no doubt about it.

Either the haze was disappearing or they were flying out of it, and in another fifteen minutes the air was as clear as usual and they could see land, although it was a good ways off.

"This is something like it, and we ought to pick them up soon if they're still in the air," Gordon declared.

CHAPTER IV

A RESCUE IN THE AIR.

"BILL, I'm not sure but I think I can see it."

"You sure?"

"Didn't I just say I wasn't?" Gordon snapped.

"But it's either that balloon or a mighty big bird."

Gordon had his eyes glued to the glass and with one hand was pointing directly ahead. Bill strained his eyes to their limit but, without the glass, was unable to see the speck against the blue sky which had attracted Gordon's attention.

"Hold her just as you are," Gordon directed. "Can you see it?"

"Not yet. Can you make it out for sure?"

For a moment Gordon did not reply, then he asserted that it was the balloon beyond a doubt.

"You can see it now, can't you?"

"I can see something."

Bill put on more speed and the distant object rapidly took on the shape of a balloon even to his unaided eyes. The plane was now at an altitude of four thousand three hundred feet and the balloon was

a trifle higher up. Another five minutes and they were near enough for Gordon to make out the forms of the children in the car and he counted four of them. The largest was a boy seemingly about six years old.

"I can't see but four," he told Bill.

"Seems to me there were six in there," Bill declared. "Maybe there are two or three lying down where you can't see them."

Bill had now slowed down his speed until they were making barely thirty miles an hour, and was flying about a hundred feet lower than the balloon. The children had seen the plane and were waving their hands and shouting at the top of their voices.

"Suppose that biggest kid will be able to catch the rope?" Gordon asked as he took from beneath his seat a coil of light but very strong rope. "We can't get near enough to hand it to him on account of our wings."

The plane was now directly beneath the balloon and Bill had started the elevator and was trying to adjust the speed of the two propellers so that his speed would coincide with the other. Finally he got it just right and for a few minutes both crafts drifted along in almost perfect unison. It took the most skillful manipulation as the wind has increased con-

siderably during the last half hour and was decidedly gusty.

"I'm going to try to come up now just to the left of them," he told Gordon as he increased the speed of the elevator.

It was harder even than he had thought, and he was obliged to keep moving the switch of the forward propeller almost constantly and even so first the plane would shoot ahead and then a sudden gust of wind would blow the balloon at an increased rate of speed. He knew that it would be an almost impossible thing for Gordon to throw the rope more than thirty feet and that meant that the wing of the plane would be dangerously close to the balloon. For the two to come into actual contact could easily prove fatal and well he knew it. At his suggestion Gordon had tied one of the cells to the end of the rope as it was the only thing he could find suitable for the purpose.

The plane was finally brought to a position where the elevator was only a few feet beneath the basket of the balloon and a bit to one side. They could see that the children were nearly frantic from fear and now there were six of them staring at the plane.

"Now all of you lie down on the bottom of the car," Gordon shouted. "I'm going to throw a weight, tied to the end of a rope, into the car and

I don't want it to hit any of you on the head. Can you hear me?"

"Sure we can," called the largest of the boys.

"All right. Now when I get the weight in the car grab hold of it and tie the rope to something. Can you do that?"

"I—I guess so," the boy stammered.

"You must, it's the only way we can save you. Now lie down flat all of you."

The six heads disappeared and Gordon announced that everything was ready for the throw. Bill increased the speed of the elevator slightly and the plane rose slowly until it was on an equal with the basket. He noted that the tip of his right wing was only about ten feet away and that was exactly the space he had calculated on. Gordon was standing up in the cockpit and an instant later threw the rope. But the throw was too low and the weight hit the side of the basket.

"Missed it," he groaned as he pulled in the rope.

Before he could get ready for another try the wind had carried the balloon off a hundred feet or more to the right and it was all of ten minutes before Bill could get the right position again. And once more Gordon missed, and again the balloon was driven away from the plane. But the third time Bill managed to get a little nearer and this

time Gordon succeeded in hurling the weight into the basket.

"Grab it," he yelled at the top of his voice. Even now should a gust strike the balloon it was almost certain that the weight would be jerked out unless the boy got it securely fastened.

But a weak voice reached them a moment later. "I've got it tied."

"Got it tied tight?" Gordon cried.

"I—I guess so."

Gordon was busily making his end of the rope fast to a short post which served as a brace for the back seat and as soon as it was tied he told Bill to start up. The rope was about sixty feet long and, as the forward propeller began to spin Gordon let it out until finally it was taut. Both boys held their breath for fear the youngster had not made his end secure, but it held and, probably for the first time in history, a plane was towing a balloon.

"We'd better take it easy," Gordon said as he noticed that the basket showed a tendency to tip as the rope tightened.

Bill had kept the elevator going as a speed of at least twenty-five miles an hour was necessary to keep the plane from falling and he feared that it would be dangerous to go that rapidly with the balloon in tow. So he regulated the speed of the two motors

in such a way that they moved at a speed of a little less than twenty miles an hour. As is usually the way with children the youngsters had quickly recovered from their fright and were now shouting and even singing. The wind was blowing directly against them and, if anything, seemed to be increasing in velocity, and the big balloon was a heavy drag on the plane. Before long Bill was forced to move the switch, which regulated the forward propeller, over to the next to the last notch to maintain their speed.

"If this wind gets much stronger we won't be able to pull it," he told Gordon.

"Well, if we can keep it up for another thirty minutes we'll be there," Gordon replied.

But Bill was obliged to use the full speed of the motor before they finally reached the land and instead of Gordon's thirty minutes, it was fully an hour later when the balloon was once more floating over the carnival grounds. It seemed to the boys that nearly every person in the city must be there and cheer after cheer arose from the crowd as Bill slowly dragged the balloon toward the ground. A piece of the rope some twelve feet long was hanging from the basket, and eager hands grasped it as the plane struck the earth. Then, a moment later, the

six children were in the arms of their parents while the excited mob yelled their joy.

"Let's get out of this," Gordon whispered.

So intent had the crowd been on seeing the children that, for the moment, the plane was neglected, and, acting on Gordon's suggestion, Bill started the elevator. But before the propeller had gained enough speed to lift the plane several men made a rush for it.

"No you don't," one of them cried as he caught hold of the side of the cockpit.

Seeing that it was of no use Bill smilingly shut off the power, and followed by Gordon, leaped from his seat. The scene which ensued can better be imagined than described. The crowd shouted itself hoarse and the parents of the children broke down and cried as they tried to express their thanks. The boys tried to make light of it but the crowd would not have it so and it was fully an hour before they could get away. But finally Mr. Burns, who had been one of the first to greet them, prevailed on the crowd to let them through on the plea that they needed rest. So, amid the cheers of the crowd, the boys climbed into the cockpit and a moment later the *Albatross* rose proudly over the heads of the multitude and turned slowly toward the Burns' home.

"Well, there's one thing certain," Mr. Burns de-

clared as they took their seats at the dinner table, "those children owe their lives to you boys and especially to your plane. I don't believe an ordinary plane could have done it."

"I don't—," Bill began but the other interrupted him.

"Of course if there had been a man in the car a rope might have been dropped from a passing plane and caught, but not with those babies."

"Well, I suppose it was rather lucky for them that we were here," Bill acknowledged modestly.

"And you'll own the city as long as you stay here," Mr. Burns laughed.

"I do hope they won't make a fuss over us," Gordon began, but Mrs. Burns broke in:

"I'm afraid you'll have to endure it. This city is one to make the most of that sort of thing," she smiled.

"You—you don't mean they'll want to give us a reception or anything like that, do you?" Bill groaned.

"You'll be lucky if you get off that easy," she assured him.

"Well," Mr. Burns said as he pushed back his chair, "I suppose we might as well make a fresh start for the office of the Tropic Shipping Company again. I 'phoned just before dinner and the presi-

dent, a Mr. Sweeney, said he'd be there to see us between two and three o'clock."

The Burns' car must have been well known in the city for their ride down town was much in the nature of a triumphal procession. Every time the car stopped or slowed down in traffic it was surrounded by a mob which insisted in shaking hands with the boys and in telling them what wonderful heroes they were. But the chauffeur kept the car moving whenever it was possible and finally about half past two they reached their destination.

Mr. Sweeney greeted them warmly and praised the boys, much to their embarrassment, for the rescue of the children. Then, after a few minutes of general conversation, Bill told him their story.

"Yes," the president said when he had finished, "the *General Jackson* belongs to our company, and as it happens, I do remember the boy you are trying to find. It wouldn't have happened once in a hundred times, but it so happened that I met the boat down the bay in a tug and boarded her as I wished to see the Captain before he landed. Well, I'm not as young as I used to be and as I was coming aboard from the tug I slipped just as I was about to step foot on the deck and would have fallen into the water if a youngster had not caught me by the collar of my coat. He was only a boy but he must have

been very strong for he saved me from falling. Of course I was grateful to him and looked him up as soon I was through with my business with the Captain. I offered to give him a position in the office here but he turned it down with the remark that he was going to hunt for gold, and I couldn't make him change his mind. I remember he said his name was Green so I suppose he is the boy you're after."

"I guess there's no doubt about that," Bill told him.

"I didn't see him again and, of course, I don't know what became of him, but I do know that he didn't go back on the *General*."

"Well, that helps a lot," Bill declared. "And it seems to me that the thing for us to do is to hunt through the gold mines until we find him. I haven't a mite of doubt but that he went there. He was the kind that, once he made up his mind to do a thing, would stick to it."

"Yes, I remember that," Mr. Sweeney smiled.

They were held up so many times on the way back that it was supper time when they at last reached home. And then, the thing which the boys had been dreading happened. Two men were on the porch as they mounted the steps and announced that they were a committee to inform them that a

reception was to be held that very night in their honor.

"It's no use for you to try to get out of it," one of them laughed, "for we're going to have you there if we have to kidnap you."

"But we haven't any clothes with us suitable to wear to a reception," Bill told them.

"And no one expects you to have. You're to come just as you are."

"All right, we'll come," Bill promised seeing that it would be churlish to refuse.

"That's fine. We can depend on it?"

"Certainly."

"I told you," Mrs. Burns smiled as the two men left. "But maybe it won't be as bad as you think."

And it was not. Once the ice was broken the boys really enjoyed themselves. Of course they were made much of and that always was embarrassing to them, but they met a lot of very fine people who took them in charge and made it as easy for them as was at all possible. The great surprise came when the mayor of the city presented each of them with a fine gold watch. Bill replied briefly to his speech and, as Gordon afterward told him, did himself proud. "Couldn't have done a whole lot better myself," he chuckled as they were undressing shortly after midnight.

"But enough is a whole lot," Bill grinned. "We're going to get out of here as soon as we can with any degree of decency. I wish we were going in the morning."

"Well, so do I," Gordon agreed, "but we're going to make it Monday morning and no mistake."

"You said it. Of course we won't be wasting all the time, as we ought to learn something about the country and, I reckon, Mr. Burns can tell us a lot."

The time intervening till Monday passed most pleasantly. Mr. Burns gave up all his time to their entertainment and spent several hours telling them about the country and where he considered the most likely places for them to try. But finally Monday morning came and after an early breakfast they bade their new friends farewell and promised that they would make them another visit before leaving for home.

"And I do hope you'll have that boy with you. He's got the making of a fine man in him if I'm any judge," Mr. Burns said as he shook their hands.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW COUNTRY

IT WAS a beautiful morning when they hopped off on their mission and they were in fine spirits in spite of the knowledge that the chances for success were greatly against them. They realized the great size of the island and, although the area of their search was greatly reduced by the suggestion that Fred Green had gone to the gold mines, they knew that it was hardly more than a suggestion. In fact they felt that it was hardly more than an even chance. But they headed west full of hope and eager anticipation.

Acting on the advise of Mr. Burns they had decided to go directly to the mines at Coolgardie in Western Australia, for here was the island's richest mine and the mecca for most of those who were searching for the yellow metal. And, knowing Fred as they did, they felt that he would most likely head for the richest field provided he had clung to his plan. Coolgardie was a little more than two thousand miles from Sydney, which meant seven-

teen or eighteen hours of flying if they took it easy. For the first three or four hours they passed over many towns, some of considerable size. Then the towns became farther apart and soon they were flying over territory which seemed practically uninhabited. Rocky and barren land stretched beneath them mile after mile and they were particularly impressed by the absence of lakes and rivers.

"This country would never do for me," Gordon declared as he began getting out their lunch shortly before noon. "I don't believe there's a fish within a thousand miles of here."

"The ocean is nearer than that," Bill reminded him.

"But I'm talking about fresh water fish."

"It does seem to be pretty dry down below."

"Dry and rocky. In fact rocks seem to be the main crop of the island so far's I can see."

"I've heard it was pretty rocky and barren in the interior and I guess, by the looks, it was no lie."

"There's a village of some sort off there," Gordon said a few minutes after they had finished eating. "Dip down a bit: it looks as though it might be interesting."

So Bill turned the nose of the plane downward and at the same time slowed down the speed. The village they soon saw consisted of twenty or thirty

huts seemingly built by sticking poles in the ground and filling in the spaces between with some kind of a long grass. The roofs appeared to be made of layers of some kind of bark simply laid on poles stretched across the tops. They could see a few children dressed as Gordon put it, in their birthday suits playing about, but no grown people were in evidence until they were almost directly over the village. Then, the children having sighted the plane, their shrill cries brought a number of women and two or three men from the huts. They were dark in color, nearly as dark as a full-blooded negro, and they wore little more clothing than did the children.

Bill had stopped the forward propeller and started the elevator, and he now allowed the plane to sink until it was floating not more than twenty feet from the ground. It was evident that the natives had never before seen an aeroplane, for they were terribly excited and uttered grunts and cries of surprise which speedily brought from the huts more men and women. Then one of the men, evidently their leader, uttered a command and at once they all threw themselves flat on the ground.

"What's the idea?" Gordon chuckled.

"Guess they think we're some kind of supernatural beings," Bill told him.

"And you can't blame them at that if they've never seen a plane before."

For several minutes the natives remained motionless on the ground, and then, at a word from the leader, they got slowly to their feet and stretched out their hands toward the plane.

"Make them a speech, Bill," Gordon grinned.

"They wouldn't understand a word of it," Bill retorted, but he leaned over the side of the cockpit and smiled and waved his hand at them.

"There's one girl trying to flirt with you," Gordon laughed, pointing to a girl about fifteen years old who was frantically waving both her arms.

"She's looking right at you," Bill retorted.

"They don't look very intelligent."

"They're not. In fact they come pretty near to being the world's dumbest humans."

"And the laziest, I'd say."

"And you'd be about right. As a rule they'll work just enough to keep themselves alive and not a bit more. At least, that's what I've read about them."

"Add to their list of accomplishments the ability to make the greatest possible amount of dirt stick to them and I reckon you'll have them about all summed up."

"There's one big guy over there by that last hut

that I'd hate to meet on a dark night if he had a grudge against me or wanted anything I had."

"He does look rather more than half way tough."

"But probably he's not so bad as he looks."

"Do you know about how many like them there are?" Gordon asked as Bill started the forward propeller and the plane began to move away.

"Not more than seventy or eighty thousand according to the encyclopedia," Bill told him.

"Which is plenty, if you inquire from me," Gordon laughed. "They sure do not look prosperous."

During the next hour they passed over several more villages, but did not pause as, from a distance, they all looked about alike. But just after four o'clock Gordon, who was surveying the country through the field glass, called Bill's attention to a number of objects which seemed to be hopping about in rather an aimless fashion off to their left. At the time they were up only a little over a thousand feet and, as the air was very clear, Bill could see the objects without the aid of the glass.

"I'll bet they're kangaroos," he declared.

"Let's see how near we can get to them."

There were about a dozen of the animals and they paid no attention to the plane until it was almost directly over them and only a few feet from the ground. Then one of them caught sight of it

and, followed closely by the others, loped off seemingly in no particular hurry but nevertheless covering the ground with considerable rapidity.

"Funny looking fellows," Bill declared as the plane picked up speed.

"Reminds me of what the old farmer said the first time he saw a hippopotamus," Gordon chuckled.

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'there ain't no sech animal.'"

As soon as the first sign of the coming night appeared they began to look for a cool place to camp for the night. At first they had intended to make it a non-stop flight, but later decided that it would be best to camp and reach their destination in the daytime. So shortly after eight o'clock the plane landed by the side of a small grove of stunted trees. They had not seen a village for more than two hours and considered that they would be safe from molestation by any of the natives.

They had brought along enough food for several meals and in a short time they had pitched their pup tents and had a small fire going.

"It's going to be pretty dark tonight," Bill declared as he sat the coffee pot on the coals.

"It's not far from it right now," Gordon told him.

An hour later and both boys were sound asleep wrapped in their blankets, for the night was cool.

The night passed without incident and at the first peep of dawn they were up and the sun had just risen over the horizon when they took off. For three hours they flew over the seemingly endless barren wastes and then, off to their left, loomed a large body of water.

"A lake at last," Gordon almost shouted.

"You miss," Bill told him.

"You mean it's a mirage?"

"No, it's real water, but it's salt water."

"You mean it's the ocean?"

"Yes, unless I'm away off on my reckoning it's what they call The Great Australian Bight. It's really a large bay."

"Well, it's a pretty good sized bite," Gordon chuckled.

"I thought you'd spring that one," Bill told him.

"Do we go over it?"

"No, our way is this side of it."

"Well, it seems good to see some H₂O once more anyhow."

Soon towns began to appear and during the next two hours they flew over several, and shortly before noon Bill pointed to a distant collection of buildings and said:

"Unless I'm mistaken that's where we're going."

Coolgardie, a few years ago, the metropolis of

Australia's richest gold fields, once boasted a population of nearly five thousand, but as mine after mine was worked out the population dwindled until probably two thousand was nearer the correct number of people who called the town home. As they flew low over the town the plane attracted the attention of many people and, when the plane settled to the ground, on the outskirts men and women as well were running toward it.

"Looks like we're going to have an audience," Gordon said as he jumped to the ground.

"Probably they don't see a plane every day," Bill reminded him.

The first to reach them was a boy of about their own age and he held out his hand with a glad smile as he ran up to Bill.

"Welcome to our city," he cried as Bill grasped his hand.

"Thanks," Bill smiled back. "Is this Coolgardie?"

"Bet your life it is, and take it from me, it's some town. Where are you fellows from?"

"We live in The United States, in Maine," Bill told him.

By this time several more people had joined them and each lost no time in shaking hands with the boys and giving them a glad welcome. Many of

them had never before seen an aeroplane and evinced great interest as the boys told them of their flight and explained the working of the *Albatross*. Their audience included many nationalities but, as Gordon afterward declared, the Irish predominated.

For nearly an hour the boys talked and showed the plane to new arrivals until not less than fifty people were collected. Then, declaring that they were hungry, they learned that there was a good hotel not more than a quarter of a mile away and a short time later they had the plane housed in a large shed back of a frame building and were sitting down to a good dinner.

"Well, these people are sure hospitable," Gordon sighed as he dug his fork into a juicy beefsteak.

"Not half bad," Bill agreed.

"Wonder where the mines are. I didn't see anything that looked like one, did you?"

"No, but I reckon they're not far off. You didn't expect them to be right in the middle of the city, did you?"

"Never thought much about it one way or the other," Gordon retorted. "But it does seem as though we ought to find out whether or not Fred has ever been here without a whole lot of trouble."

"I'd say so, and as a start, we might have a lit-

tle talk with the proprietor of this hotel and see what he can tell us."

They were through their dinner by this time and, noticing that the man who seemed to be in charge, was sitting alone on the porch, they lost no time in joining him. The sign over the door read "Haddon's Inn," and assuming that he was Mr. Haddon Bill so addressed him.

"No, my name's Holt," he told them. "Haddon's been dead most five years, but I've always kept the sign up there just the same. Understand you boys are from the States."

"Yes, sir; from Maine," Bill told him.

"Well, that's funny. Matter of fact, I used to live in Maine myself. Town by the name of Smithfield."

"Smithfield? Why, that's only ten miles from our home. We live in Skowhegan," Gordon told him.

"You don't say so. Well, well; reckon we'll have to shake hands on that all around. Of course it's been all of thirty years since I left home and I've never got back, but I'm going to before I die if I live a few years longer."

For fully an hour the man kept them talking about the home state and they found that he had known many of the older generation with whom they were

acquainted. Of course, all this was very pleasant and, as soon as the conversation began to lag a bit, they told him the object of their trip and asked if he could tell them anything about the boy they were seeking.

"Let me see now," he said, scratching his head thoughtfully. "I'm not sure, but it seems to me that there was a boy here about a year ago who would answer to your description, but I don't think he was here very long. If it's the fellow, he worked in one of the mines a few weeks and then drifted off somewhere. You see, the mines around here are pretty near played out. 'Course there are two or three that are still in the game and doing pretty good, but they aren't what they used to be by a long shot."

"Then you're sure he isn't here now?" Bill asked

"Dead sure of that. I reckon I know about everyone in this town and he ain't here."

"And you've no idea where he went from here?"

"Sorry, but I reckon that's about the size of it. You see, I didn't know him at all, just remember to have seen him about town, and perhaps it wasn't the one after all. Tell you what I'll do, though. I'll ask around this afternoon and see if I can find out anything. No, it won't be any trouble and, even

if 'twas it's all right. Anything I can do for a body from Maine is as good as done."

The boys thanked him warmly and he soon left them saying that he would be back before time for supper and would know all there was to know by that time. "And," he added, "I reckon you'd better go up to your room and take a snooze while I'm gone. No, you can't do a thing to help, and you look as though you need the sleep."

"He sure knows his winks," Gordon yawned as soon as Mr. Holt had left them. "And I'm going to take his advice right away."

"And I'm going to make it unanimous," Bill smiled as he followed Gordon into the inn.

It was after five o'clock when they awoke and, on going down to the office, they learned that Mr. Holt had not as yet returned. But he came into the dining-room just as they were sitting down to supper.

"Yes," he told them in answer to their look of inquiry, "I found out something. First off, he's the boy all right and he worked in the Sunrise Mine for about a month. Then he said he was going up country and see if he could find some gold for himself, and so far's I can find out that's what he did. I mean he went, but as to finding any gold I don't

know a thing about it. Leastwise he left here last August, about the middle of the month."

"And he hasn't come back?" Bill asked.

"No, not's far as I could learn. No one's seen him since he pulled out, and I reckon I've asked more'n twenty fellows."

"Did you find out which way he went?" Gordon asked.

"Well, not for sure, but one fellow, who knew him, said as how he told him he was going to strike up toward The Great Sandy Desert."

"Where's that?"

"Five or six hundred mile north of here."

"Is there any gold there?" Bill asked.

"Well, now, that's another question. The Great Sandy Desert is just about what you'd expect from the name. I've never been there, but I've known a fellow or two who has and, according to what they say, it's a pretty wild place. As to there being gold there, I don't know. I've heard that there is, but I never saw a man yet who ever found any. But I guess not many have tried it up there: it's too far away from civilization to suit most folks."

"How about natives up there?" Gordon asked.

"That's another thing that's kept people away from the place. There's natives up there all right and, according to reports, they are not very fond of

the whites. In fact, rather strange reports come in every once in a while about them, but it's hard to tell if there's anything in them. He was warned not to go up there, but I guess he was kind of stubborn like according to what I hear."

"He was all of that," Bill told him. "Mind, I don't mean that he was disagreeable or always wanting to have his own way, but when he once made up his mind to do a thing it took a lot to stop him."

"I reckon. Well, that's about all I could find out. He started off up that way, had a pretty fair outfit, including a fair-to-middlin' horse, and he's never come back to the best of my knowledge."

"You think he's still up there, then?" Gordon asked.

"Well, you know as much about that as I do. 'Course he may have struck across country for the East Coast, and then again he may have kept north and struck one of the towns on the North Coast. There are several up there like Condon and Broome, small places, of course, but ships put in there once in awhile. Then again——"

"He may be dead?" Bill asked as Mr. Holt paused.

"Well, that's possible, of course."

"And, I guess it means that we've got a man-

sized job cut out for us," Gordon said, turning to Bill.

"Looks as though it might shape up that way," Bill agreed.

"You mean you're going up there to hunt for him?" Holt asked.

"Why, of course that's what we came here for," Bill assured him.

"Well, I reckon you're old enough to know your business, but you want to remember that you're going to a pretty dangerous place and you want to go armed."

"We've each got an automatic," Bill told him.

"And I reckon you know how to use 'em," Mr. Holt chuckled. "And another thing," he added. "You want to take along plenty of eats, because there doesn't much grow on that desert and I reckon you like your meals fairly regular."

"Three a day at least," Gordon assured him.

"He'd rather make it four or even five if he had his way," Bill added.

"How soon do you plan to start?" Mr. Holt asked as he got up from the table.

"Why, the sooner the better, I reckon. Can we get some provisions tonight?"

"Sure you can. There's a good store right around the corner that is open till around nine o'clock, and

I reckon you can get everything you need there."

"Then we'll fit up tonight and get off first thing in the morning," Bill told him.

They went around to the store as soon as they had finished supper and found everything they wanted, and by ten o'clock, the *Albatross* was packed and ready for an early start in the morning.

"Something tells me that we're in for an adventure," Gordon declared as he turned out the light an hour later.

"Getting a hunch?" Bill sleepily asked.

"Maybe."

"Well, I reckon we're going to see a new country all right."

"New in more ways than one, if you inquire from me," Gordon said as he jumped into bed.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF INTO THE UNKNOWN

"WE don't know where we're going but we're on our way."

It was shortly before eight o'clock the following morning and the boys had hopped off fifteen minutes before Gordon made the statement. The plane was headed due north and Gordon was at the wheel. Already the town of Coolgardie had faded in the distance and the country had begun to take on a barren look. They were up about a thousand feet and there was just enough tang in the clear air to make them feel, as Gordon would say, like fighting their weight in wild cats.

"Don't know is right," Bill agreed soberly. "How's that hunch of yours working this morning? Are we going to find him?"

"Sure we are, but it isn't going to be easy, make up your mind to that."

"So we find him alive that part's all right."

"Did Mr. Holt say how big this desert is?"

"I don't think he did but I reckon it's pretty good sized."

"Well, we can hunt over a lot of ground in a day, thanks to the old bird."

"But we've got to go slow and sure."

"Sure we have, but even so, we can see a good ways from a few thousand feet up."

"There's a lake," Bill announced a few minutes later pointing off to his left.

"And that looks like the desert off there ahead of us," Gordon announced.

"But not our desert," Bill told him.

"There's more than one, then?"

"Sure. Australia is rich in deserts. If I'm not mistaken that is The Great Victorian Desert."

For an hour they flew over the barren sand and, as Bill declared, it was barren with a big B. So far they had seen no sign of a human being since leaving Coolgardie and it was certainly getting lonesome and a bit on their nerves. But about eleven o'clock the sand began to give way to stunted bushes and small trees and once they passed directly over a small native village but saw no men. Several women and many children watched the plane as it flew low over the bark thatched huts and both boys waved their arms in token of good will. But either the good will was not returned or else the natives were

too much amazed to give evidence of their regard.

"Wonder where all the men are," Bill mused as they left the village behind.

"Maybe it's a woman's colony," Gordon chuckled.

"Perhaps they're out on a hunt or something."

"Or something is more likely right. What would they hunt around here?"

"Search me, but I suppose some kind of animals live on this island."

Half an hour later they saw another village and again they flew low and once they were amazed to see only women and children. Not a single man was in sight and the boys were much puzzled, but they were unable to make a satisfactory guess as to the reason.

An hour later Bill's sharp eyes caught sight of a small stream, looking from their height like a thread of silver, and they decided to land and have a hot dinner. They had not seen another village and a long look through the glass gave no indication that any human was within miles of the place.

The stream proved to be a river of some twenty feet in width but it was shallow and the water muddy and far too warm to drink even had it looked inviting. They had, in the plane, a couple of gallon vacuum jugs filled with water so they were in no hurry to locate a spring or stream of drinkable

water. There was an abundance of dead wood lying about and soon Gordon had a fire going and bacon sizzling in the frying pan.

"Suppose there's anything that looks like a fish in that river?" Gordon asked.

"I doubt it," Bill told him. "But you never can tell. Why don't you try it? Your rod is in the back compartment."

"Believe I will," Gordon declared, "that is, if you don't need any help."

Go ahead, you're only in the way," Bill laughed and a few minutes later Gordon was casting a fly out over the water.

But either there were no fish in the river or they did not fancy his flies for, although he cast until Bill called that dinner was ready, he never got a strike.

"Oh, well, no self-respecting fish would live in that stuff anyhow," he declared as he unjointed his rod.

"These chops will have to do, I guess," Bill told him. "And they're the last we'll get till we get back to a town. I didn't dare buy more than enough for one meal for fear they'd spoil."

They were through eating and were about to start cleaning up when a curious whirring sound just over their heads caused them to look up. Just

beyond them and about four feet from the ground flew a piece of wood bent nearly at right angles in the center and about two feet long.

"Duck," Bill shouted as the club curved and started back directly toward them.

And as he gave warning just in time for it barely missed Gordon's head as he threw himself to the ground.

"Wh—what is it?" he gasped.

"It's a boomerang."

"But——"

But his next question was cut short by another missile which came even nearer. Then, quickly raising his head slightly, Bill saw a black man standing about thirty feet from them and in the act of hurling a third boomerang.

"He'll get us in a minute," he said in a low tone. "Let's make a break for the plane. Quick now."

The *Albatross* was about twenty feet away from the fire and, fortunately they were between it and the black. So, at Bill's word, they both sprang to their feet and ran for the plane. But Gordon, who was a couple of yards behind Bill, was too late to escape the whirring missive which the black threw with splendid aim and it caught him squarely between the shoulder blades and knocked him over and he fell headlong. Bill heard him hit the ground

and, heedless of his own danger, dashed back and pulled him to a place of temporary safety behind the plane.

"You hurt?" he cried.

"B-breath k-knocked o-out," Gordon gasped.

"Nothing broken?"

"I-I reckoned n-not."

By this time Bill had reached over the side of the cockpit and secured his revolver and now he glanced over the body of the plane and saw that the native was still standing in the same place. But he seemed undecided what to do. In his hand he held one of the boomerangs and several times he drew back his arm as though to hurl it but each time he seemed to think better of it and let his arm fall to his side.

"How you coming?" Bill asked turning back to Gordon who was now sitting up.

"All right, but, believe me, that baby sure slings a mean club. I'm going to be sore for a month. Ouch."

"He seems to be all alone."

"Hope he is. Two of 'em with those clubs would be more than a plenty."

Bang!

One of the sticks struck the side of the plane and fell to the ground.

"That makes two he hasn't got," Gordon chuckled. "Wonder how many of them they carry around with them."

"He's got one more at least," Bill told him after a hasty glance. "Had I better give him a shot?"

"I wouldn't hit him."

"Of course not, but I guess a little moral suasion so to speak may do a heap of good."

Bill aimed in the air and pulled the trigger. But if he thought the report was going to scare the black he was disappointed, for the man immediately let fly another of the sticks which barely missed the elevator.

"Guess he's heard a pop gun before," Bill grinned.

"Has he got still another boomerang?"

"Guess not. I can't see any."

"Then perhaps he's harmless."

For a moment or two the black stood gazing at the plane then, with a defiant nod of the head, he turned and walked slowly toward the river and, plunging in, waded across to disappear a moment later behind a thick clump of bushes.

"That guy's a long way from home or else we missed something when we were looking for villages," Gordon said as they walked back toward their fire.

"And he doesn't seem to care how he wastes his

boomerangs," Bill smiled as he held out the two which he had picked up by the plane. "How does your back feel?"

"It's mighty sore but I reckon there's nothing broken. But I'd hate to get a whack on the head with one of the things. Keep those and when we get time we'll practice with them. I understand they can throw them and make them come right back to where they started from. Some stunt if you ask me."

"Well, I saw the first one he threw coming back and it almost got me on the head."

They hurriedly finished cleaning up their few dishes as they were anxious to get away from the place not knowing how many of the natives might be in the vicinity. Knowing that they were safe in the air they spent some time flying about to see if they could catch sight of any of them. But they failed to see even the one, which was not so surprising as there was plenty of hiding places in the bushes which grew near the other side of the stream. So, giving it up as a hopeless effort, they again headed north.

The land beneath them continued barren and, for the most part, very rocky, and there was no sign of a native village. But, shortly before three o'clock, unmistakable signs of the desert began to appear,

and soon they were flying low over what seemed an endless waste of sand.

"Who ever heard of finding gold in a desert anyhow," Gordon said as he swept the horizon with the glass. "Honest, Bill, I haven't said anything about it but there's something fishy about this business. Or it seems that way to me. Why would anyone come up here in this wilderness to find gold? Tell me that."

"I've had the same feeling ever since we started," Bill acknowledged. "But, you remember, that man at the inn said he had heard reports of gold being found up here and he seemed honest."

"I know he did, but I don't believe there's a grain of it within a good many miles of here. Gold in a desert is a big joke according to my way of thinking."

"The idea's not so good for a fact, but now we're here we'll look about at bit."

"Sure we will. But I'm telling you right now that we're not going to find any Fred Green or the desert. I have spoken."

"If I were to bet I'd bet that way," Bill agreed.

They were flying in large circles only a few rods above the ground and at slow speed and Gordon was watching, all the time they had been talking, through the glass. But he saw nothing worthy

of mention. Oceans of sand as far as he could see with a stunted clump of bushes here and there gave a most dreary aspect to the country. Finally the plane passed over a clump of considerable size and, as it was getting close to supper time, they decided to land and camp for the night.

"What a blessing a vacuum jug is," Bill declared as he poured water almost ice cold into his cup. "I'd sure hate to be here without one."

"You said something," Gordon agreed as he began getting out their provisions. "Wonder if there are any of those boomerang throwers hanging around here."

"Not likely, but I'll make a good search of this clump of bushes while you're building a fire."

Bill took his revolver and started to walk around the clump which covered rather more than an acre. The bushes were of a species new to him and he judged that they belonged to the cactus family although they were different from any cactus he had ever seen. They were not more than four feet high but grew very close together and, as they were thick with sharp thorns, did not invite an ingress into the interior of the clump. So he contented himself with making a circuit and came back to where Gordon was building the fire without having seen anything in the least suspicious.

"I didn't penetrate the interior of that clump," he told Gordon, "It's altogether too sticky but I'll bet my hat there's no one hiding there. A mosquito would have hard work to get more than a foot and a half from the edge let alone a man."

"All right, but if one of those crooked sticks comes going and returning over our heads don't blame me."

"I'll not blame you, but I think we're perfectly safe here."

Although the day had been hot, as soon as the sun sank below the horizon it cooled off rapidly and by the time they were ready to go to bed it was very cool, and they were glad to wrap their blankets about them as they crawled into their pup tents. They had pitched the two tents close together and for an hour or more they talked. But they were both good sleepers and by nine o'clock they were asleep.

The night passed without incident and neither awoke until the sun was up. Then they hurried to get breakfast over as they were anxious to resume their search. As Gordon had said the night before, the loneliness of the place was enough to get on anyone's nerves and both were already beginning to feel it. So soon after six the plane was again in the air.

All day long they flew slowly back and forth over the desert, stopping at noon only long enough to cook dinner, but no sign of any living creature was seen. Neither did they see anything which even remotely suggested a mine, and when night came they were sure that they had entirely covered the area of the desert.

"We'll spend the night here," Bill said as he brought the plane to the ground shortly after six o'clock, "and in the morning we'll visit that town on the coast called Condon. It can't be very far from here, and perhaps we'll strike some news there. It's a dead cinch that he isn't here."

"I told you that before," Gordon reminded him.

"I know you did, but we had to make sure of it."

"Which I reckon we've done."

It was shortly after eight o'clock the following morning when Bill brought the plane down on the outskirts of a little town which nestled close to the ocean. A small stream emptied its water into the sea close to the left of the town and it was near the bank of the river that the *Albatross* landed. A small ship of the schooner type lay at anchor out in the middle of the stream and a half dozen sailors were watching as the plane settled down. Apparently no one from the town, only a few yards distant,

had spied them as no one was visible in that direction.

"Is this Condon?" Gordon shouted as he stood on the bank of the stream.

"You've hit it," one of the sailors called back. "Who are you?"

Gordon told them and added that they were from The United States, and the sailor, who had asked the question, told him that their ship, *The Mary*, was from San Francisco, and added that they were coming ashore to shake hands with them. But before the boat, into which they clambered, had reached the shore, the plane had been seen from the town and soon they were surrounded by a small mob of excited and curious people of both sexes. So the boys were obliged to hold an impromptu reception and to tell their story and exhibit the plane. All this took more than an hour but finally the people by twos and threes returned to the town and only a few remained. One of these, a man of middle age, who had seemed especially friendly, asked them if there was anything he could do for them.

"There's no hotel in town," he told them, "but I keep a kind of boarding house and if you can put up with plain fare you'll be mighty welcome."

So, after they had found a shed large enough to

hold the plane and, with the aid of a couple of men, had pushed it in, they found themselves located in a small but very clean room on the second floor of a frame building which stood in the center of the town and only a few feet from the river. The food, served them for dinner, was plain but it was well cooked and, as Gordon assured the proprietor, sure did hit the right spot.

As soon as they had finished eating they told the man the object of their trip and asked him if he could give them any information.

"I reckon I can," the man told them and their spirits rose. "That fellow was here in this town about six months ago. I remember him. Tall fellow and rather skinny with a freckled face. He said his name was Fred Green and that he was from some place in Maine."

"Skowhegan?" Bill asked.

"That's it. I never was good at remembering the names of places, but now you mention it that was the name."

"But he isn't here now, is he?" Gordon asked.

"No, he isn't here now. He only stopped in town for about a week. You see, how come I knew him was because he stopped here with me."

"But you know where he went?" Bill asked anxiously.

"Well, I know where he said he was going. Seems he'd been chasing round the big desert hunting for gold and of course he didn't find any for the very good reason that there's none there to find. He seemed a heap discouraged but vowed he'd not give up till he did find it. Now the only place in this part of Australia where there's been any gold found is in the Mt. Stewart district, and I told him so."

"And he went there?"

"That's where he started for."

"Where is it?"

"It's about four hundred miles west of here."

"Has much gold been found there?"

"Well, I don't know's I call it much but there's been quite a lot."

"Then I guess, Gordon, we'll be on our way in the morning," Bill said.

"On another wild goose chase," Gordon added.

"Perhaps, but it's the only thing we can do, isn't it?"

"Sure. I wasn't arguing against it, you understand. And perhaps we'll find him this time. I always did think that desert stuff was phoney when it came to gold."

"But he had been there," Bill reminded him.

During the afternoon they spent a couple of hours going over the plane and making sure that everything was all right. They also replenished their food supply and went to bed early as they wanted to make an early start.

CHAPTER VII.

DINGOS

"I THINK I can see them."

It was about ten o'clock the following morning and Gordon, who had been using the glass most of the time since they have hopped off, was referring to the mountains known as the Stewart range.

"It's about time we were getting there," Bill told him.

"I suppose they call them mountains but they don't look to me like anything you'd write home about," Gordon declared a little later when they were nearly there.

"Never mind that," Bill told him. "We aren't here for the scenery."

For an hour they flew back and forth over the range looking for some sign of human life but none was seen and, shortly before noon Gordon spied a small stream trickling between two mountains and at the same time a good landing place. So Bill

brought the plane down and landed in a beautiful spot about twenty feet from the stream.

"If there aren't trout in that brook I don't know my fins," Gordon declared as he reached for his rod. "You get a fire started and I'll do the rest."

He was about to start for the brook when a short sharp bark caused both boys to turn quickly.

"For the love of Pete, what's that?" Gordon gasped.

"I'm not sure," Bill replied, "but I think it's a dingo."

The animal, which was about the size of a collie, with short erect ears, a bushy tail and reddish hair, was standing just at the edge of the clearing and not more than a dozen feet from the plane. It was showing its fangs and emitting low deep throated growls.

"What in the world's a dingo and why?" Gordon asked.

"That is," Bill chuckled.

"But it looks like a dog to me."

"And that's what it is, a wild dog."

"He looks wild all right. Are they supposed to be friendly?"

"Seems to me they are pretty fierce."

"He looks the part, but I'm going to see if I can make friends with him. Here, pup, nice doggie."

Gordon took a step toward the dog slamming his hand against his leg. He loved dogs and had never had the slightest trouble in making friends with the most ferocious. But this one evidently did not know the rules, for as Gordon advanced, he also stepped forward but with a gleam of anger in his eyes.

"Look out, he's going to jump you," Bill warned.

But the warning came to late. Gordon was on the point of retreating when suddenly the dog sprang and struck him full in the chest. The suddenness of the attack and the force of the impact threw him off his balance and he fell over backward. But, as he fell, his hands shot out instinctively and grasped the dog by the throat thus, for the moment keeping the sharp teeth from his own throat. But he had grasped only the hair and so was able to do no damage to his assailant as he dared not loose his grip long enough to get a fresh one. He knew that the powerful animal would soon squirm loose but he also knew that Bill was close at hand. Thus he was not surprised when he felt the dog snatched from his grasp.

Bill had acted almost at once. Grabbing hold of the dog's bushy tail with both hands, he pulled with all his strength and as Gordon's hands released their hold he swung the snarling animal about his head and hurled him through the air. The dog struck the ground with a thump and for an instant acted as

though stunned. But if that was the case it soon recovered and slowly got to its feet. But by this time Bill had got his automatic from the plane and had him covered.

"Don't shoot him," Gordon, who had by this time recovered and sprung to his feet, begged. "He——"

"If he tries that—" Bill interrupted, but the dog evidently had, for the time being, had enough and was slinking away with his tail between his legs.

"Gee, but he's strong," Gordon panted.

"Funny he didn't scratch you any," Bill said glancing at Gordon's clothes which showed no tears.

"I guess he didn't have time to think of it before you grabbed him. Anyhow your skill at throwing the hammer came in mighty handy just then. It took both strength and skill to do that. I'll bet that fellow weighs all of thirty pounds."

"Wouldn't wonder. Anyhow I reckon he's convinced that he was barking up the wrong tree that time. But we'd better keep our guns in our pockets after this when we're on the ground. No knowing how thick they may be around here."

"But I can't understand why he flew at me that way. You know dogs always like me."

"Well, you must remember that he's a wild dog and perhaps he never saw a human being before, so

you could hardly expect him to be up on the rules."

"But instinct should have told him that I wasn't going to hurt him."

"Maybe he hasn't any."

"I reckon that's it."

"You'd better get after those trout if we're going to have them for supper," Bill suggested.

"Gee, I was going to get some trout, wasn't I?" Gordon declared as he stepped toward the plane.

"Maybe," Bill chuckled.

"What do you mean, maybe?"

"Just maybe."

"Suppose there are any worms around here?" Gordon asked as he jointed his rod.

"You'll have to find some if you're going to do any fishing. You never could use a fly in that little brook."

Worms proved to be very scarce but, after about twenty minutes of hard work with a screw driver for a shovel, he secured four skinny red ones. "Four worms four trout," he told Bill. "Will that be enough for supper?"

"Depends on the size," Bill laughed.

"Well, we'll have to make them not less than half a pound I reckon. That'll make a pound apiece for us."

He soon found a likely looking hole about a dozen

rods up the stream and, standing well back, cast the baited hook.

Splash! The strike was so sudden that it all but pulled the rod from his hands. But he held on to it and, knowing that there was little room in the narrow pool to play the fish, straightened it out and began to reel in trusting to the line to hold. It did and soon he had the pleasure of landing a beautiful rainbow that weighed well over a pound. The same pool yielded three more almost as large and, having no more worms, he hurried back to where Bill already had a good fire going.

"Lookit," he cried holding up the fish which he had strung on a forked stick.

"Good boy," Bill congratulated him. "Hurry up and get them dressed and we'll have a supper fit for a king."

"With hot biscuits?"

"You said it."

"Gee, but this sure does seem like old times in the Maine woods," Gordon said an hour later as he reached for his fifth biscuit. "I'm sure glad you brought along that flour. These biscuits just about melt in your mouth."

"They seem to be melting all right," Bill declared as he glanced at the almost empty pan.

"I'm afraid there'll not be enough for breakfast," Gordon sighed.

"I know it," Bill laughed, "but I can make some more in the morning. I suppose we'll have to have some to go with rest of the trout."

As soon as they cleaned up after eating they pitched the pup tents close together and pulled a quantity of coarse grass, of which there was plenty, for beds. Bill was aware that something was on Gordon's mind although he made no mention of it. Perhaps, he thought, the attack of the wild dog had scared him more than he had thought. He noticed that he kept looking quickly behind him as though he had heard a noise which disturbed him. Usually Gordon was anything but nervous and it rather alarmed Bill to see him in that condition.

But he knew it would be of little use to say anything so he did not mention the matter. Then, when it was nearly dark, he heard away off in the distance a sound which sent a cold chill down his back.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Been hearing it for the last half hour," Gordon told him.

"You have? That's the first time I've heard it."

"I know, but my ears are keener than yours, you know."

"Wolves?"

"If we were in Maine I'd say yes but there aren't any wolves here are there?"

"Don't think so."

"But there are those dingos, and if you ask me, I'll say they're just as bad."

For some time they listened, but although they could hear the howls they did not seem to be coming any nearer, and finally they decided that they were not the occasion of the gathering of the dogs.

"I had an idea that that fellow you gave the whirlwind twist to was getting some of his playmates together to give us a surprise party, but I guess they have other plans," Gordon said after it had been several minutes since they had heard the sound.

"Guess you're right," Bill agreed, "and we'd better turn in."

It was several hours later when Gordon woke Bill by pulling him half way out of his tent by one leg.

"What is it?" he asked sleepily.

"Listen."

"Gee, there must be a thousand of them."

"And what's more they aren't very far off."

By this time Bill was out of the tent and on his feet. It was a curious sound which was filling the air, half barks and half growls, but, as Gordon had said, they were now only a short distance away and coming rapidly nearer.

"They're after us I guess," Bill said.

"I reckon. Guess we'd better get in the plane till we see what happens."

"And we'd better make it snappy."

And they were none too soon for hardly had they climbed into the cockpit when, in the bright moonlight which made it almost as light as day, a number of the dogs burst through the thick woods which surrounded the open space. More followed closely on the heels of the first comers until there were not less than fifty of the hungry brutes snapping and snarling about the plane. Then one big fellow braver than the others, leaped for the cockpit on Gordon's side. But a bullet from his automatic caught him fairly in the chest and he fell back to be almost instantly torn in pieces by the pack. This gave them a moment's respite and Bill agreed with Gordon that they had better get into the air and let the dogs have the ground. But when Bill pushed over the switch to the elevator there was no response.

"Can you beat it?" he grumbled.

"What's the matter?" Gordon asked quickly.

"I forgot. The cells are all in my tent."

"Great guns, do you mean it?"

"Sorry, but that's what."

By this time the dogs had finished their gruesome meal and were casting greedy eyes toward the two

boys. But they seemed to sense the fate of their leader and hesitated to follow his example.

"If we can keep them off till daylight I reckon they'll go away," Bill said. "It'll only be about two hours."

"Well, we can give them a number of meals in the meantime," Gordon told him.

"But we'd better save our ammunition unless we have to use it."

"There's one fellow that's going to have a try at us by the looks," Gordon said pointing to a big looking brute that was crouching a few feet away.

"Better nail him before he tries it."

Gordon took careful aim and fired just as the dog was about to leap, and again they had a short respite. But a few moments later the dogs, having finished their second meal, seemed to be gaining courage and three of them, two on Bill's side and the other on Gordon's, leaped at the same time. Gordon got his and Bill was equally successful with one but the other caught hold of the side of the pit and hung there for an instant. But Bill got him through the head before he could clamber in.

"Looks rather serious," he snapped.

"Maybe those three will satisfy them and they'll give it up," Gordon suggested.

"I doubt it. But I've got an idea. As soon as

they finish with those I want you to kill a number as far from the plane on your side as possible."

"What's the idea?"

"Why, they'll all make a rush for them and then I'll get the cells while they're busy."

"Too risky."

"I don't think so. It's only a few steps and it won't take a minute."

"You're a better shot than I am. You do the shooting and I'll go after the cells."

"Not so you'd notice it. I know right where they are and I can get them quicker than you can."

"Well, I——"

Fire three shots and then you'll have three left to cover me in case my plan doesn't work, but I believe it will."

Gordon knew it would be no use to argue so he reluctantly consented. He waited until the three dogs which had been killed were devoured and then, standing up in the pit, took careful aim and fired three shots in rapid succession. Almost before the first dog hit had fallen the pack rushed for it and Bill, seeing that the way to the tent was clear, leaped over the side and ran as fast as he could go. Gordon saw him creep into the tent to reappear a moment later with some of the cells in his arms.

But three of the dogs, for some reason, had left

the pack and bounded around the front of the plane just as Bill straightened up and started for it. As he saw them coming he gave a loud shout and Gordon dropped one in its tracks. But he missed with the next shot and the third, although it struck did not stop the beast. In an instant they were at him and, using one of the cells as a club, Bill brought it down on the head of the foremost as he leaped and the dog dropped without a sound. But the other one was so close behind that it had bowled him over before he had time to strike again.

Gordon had quickly shoved a fresh clip of shells into the automatic and was ready to fire again before Bill was down, but even as he took aim, he saw he would be just as likely to hit his brother as to kill the dog. Regardless of his own danger he leaped from the cockpit and had started on the run when he saw Bill spring to his feet rolling the dog from his body as he got up.

"Get back quick," he shouted.

Seeing that Bill was safe for the moment Gordon turned and emptied his automatic almost in the faces of a half dozen dogs that were just rounding the nose of the plane. The leaders dropped and were immediately pounced upon by the others giving both boys time to get to their seats. Bill had two of the cells in his hands and it was but a moment's work to slip

them in place and a minute later the *Albatross* was hovering in the air twenty feet above the snarling pack.

"So he did go get his playmates after all," Bill declared as he looked at the dogs below.

"I had a sneaking idea he'd do it," Gordon told him.

"Well, they ought not to be very hungry after they finish the meal we've furnished them."

"But they might have eaten each other just as well without bothering us seems to me."

"Well, I guess they don't eat each other alive, but when one of them gets killed the others think it's a waste of raw material to neglect him. They're a good deal like wolves in that respect at least."

"Hope there aren't very many of them if we've got to stay around here long. Believe me they're vicious."

"I had a good sample."

"Going to stay here till they leave?"

"Might as well. The rest of the cells are in that tent and I don't like to lose sight of it."

"You don't suppose they'll eat the cells do you?"

"No, but just the same, I don't want to get far away from them."

The plane was floating at about the same distance from the ground and, as there was no wind, it was

not difficult to keep it practically stationary. The dogs had, by this time, finished their unfortunate companions and were seemingly more or less satisfied. Many of them were stretched out on the ground asleep but a few were casting greedy eyes toward the plane.

"Doesn't look to me as though they were going to be in any hurry about leaving," Gordon grumbled. "Perhaps if we shoot a few more the rest will eat them for dessert and call it a night."

"I don't think we'd better waste too many shots on them but you might see if you can get that fellow that's nosing about my tent."

Gordon took careful aim at a big dingo just as he was about to sneak into the tent and he dropped in the entrance. The rest of the pack instead of leaping upon him seemed scared at the sound of the shot and, led by one of the largest, they quickly disappeared into the woods.

"Evidently appetite is a big stimulant to their courage," Bill chuckled as he watched the last one slink out of sight.

"Well, it seems to me they're showing mighty good judgment. They see that they can't get us and they've had enough for themselves, so they're calling it a finished job."

"I hope so," Bill said as he allowed the plane to sink to the ground.

"Better not get out till we're sure they're not coming back," Gordon advised.

"Guess we might as well finish the night right here," Bill agreed as he leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes.

The seats in the plane were not very comfortable beds but both boys were able to sleep under almost any circumstances and it was not long before they were in the land of Nod.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE GATHERING

IT WAS broad daylight when Bill awoke. Gordon was still sound asleep but opened his eyes as Bill was climbing over the side. There was no sign of the dogs save the bones of the ones they had killed and the body of the last one which was stretched in front of Bill's tent.

"You got him right through the head," Bill declared as he leaned over the body. "Reckon he never knew what hit him."

"Are the rest of the cells all right?" Gordon asked as he jumped from the plane to the ground.

"All right," Bill announced a minute later.

"Good, let's get breakfast."

It was well after nine o'clock before they were ready to start again. They had decided that the only thing to do was to fly low in widening circles until they saw something worthy of investigation. They knew, from the study of their map and from what they had been told, that the area to be searched was some 200 miles square and they were determined to

make the search thorough. Gordon took the wheel and Bill picked up the glass as the plane rose from the ground.

"Think you'd know a mine if you saw one?" Gordon asked as the plane cleared the tops of the trees and headed south.

"Reckon I know a hole in the ground," Bill retorted, and then added: "But I don't imagine he has anything like a mine. He's just a prospector. If he'd struck a mine they would probably have heard of it back there at Condon."

All during the forenoon they flew keeping the plane just high enough to clear the tree tops in safety, and at noon landed in the only suitable place they had seen during the last hour. No indication had they seen that man had ever been there and both were a bit discouraged although neither would admit it. Probably neither of them had really expected to find the boy amid these mountains but they were naturally hopeful and hated to acknowledge failure. During the afternoon Bill ran the plane and Gordon acted as lookout, and shortly after four o'clock, he announced that unless he was greatly mistaken, there was a cabin about a mile to their right and now slightly behind them.

He was right for, a few minutes later, the plane was directly over a small log cabin set in a small

clearing directly on the summit of one of the highest peaks. For several minutes Bill held the plane about fifty feet above the cabin while they watched not only the building but the surrounding territory. But no sign of life appeared and finally he brought the plane down to the ground only a few feet from the door of the cabin. It was a small building, hardly more than twelve by fourteen feet and the door was open a few inches.

"Deserted centuries ago if I'm a judge," Gordon declared as he jumped to the ground.

"You lose," Bill told him a minute later as he got down on his knees beside the plane. "Look at this."

"But you don't know how long ago that foot print was made."

"That's true, but it was made by someone wearing shoes or boots."

"And if we were up in Maine I'd say it had been made not more than two days ago, but I don't know much about this soil. It doesn't rain much here does it?"

"This is the rainy season, or rather the tail end of it, but I don't believe it's rained very lately."

"Then that print may have been made recently or it may have been there a long time."

"Exactly, but it proves that a white man has been here."

"The cabin proves that. The natives don't make them like this. Leastwise none that we've seen have been."

"Well, let's take a peep inside; maybe we'll learn something there."

The door swung open on hinges which were so rusty that one gave way and allowed it to sag. Inside there was nothing. The floor was of dirt, very hard and worn smooth. A small window without glass admitted light on either side but it was, as Gordon declared, like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, bare. Not a single article of furniture remained.

"Well, when he or they or it moved out they or he or it sure made a clean job of it," Gordon declared.

"They didn't leave much behind and that's a fact," Bill agreed.

He went outside and began examining the logs on the south side of the cabin and after a few minutes gave it as his opinion that it had been built several years before.

"Those rusty hinges tell that," Gordon gibed.

"Not for sure," Bill retorted. "They might have been rusty when they were put on and then again, I imagine iron rusts pretty fast here in the rainy season."

"All right, I'm not disputing you. I'd say it's been

here a good while which helps us exactly none at all. Now if we could find Fred's initials carved in one of these logs we could be reasonable sure that he had been here."

"Let's make sure they're not here. It'll only take a few minutes and this'll be a good place to spend the night. I've flown all I want to today."

But after they had made a thorough search both on the outside and inside they were forced to admit that if Fred Green had ever been there he had left no mark of his presence behind him.

"Nor anyone else for that matter," Gordon added. "Who ever heard of building a log cabin and not cutting your initials in it. By the way, what kind of wood are those logs?"

"Eucalyptus, if I'm not mistaken. Smell them."

"They smell all right and not so bad at that, but I don't know what a eucalyptus tree smells like."

"I didn't till a few minutes ago," Bill laughed. "But I do now. Have you noticed the size and height of some of those babies a little further down the mountain. I'll bet some of them are all of four hundred feet tall. Of course these are small ones."

"They get some kind of oil from them, don't they?"

"Sure, eucalyptus oil. I've heard a street hawker

telling about it and how it would cure everything from a sore toe to consumption."

The boys had noticed since the middle of the afternoon that a storm was breaking and before supper was over they had decided to sleep inside the cabin, and they hurried to pull some of the long coarse grass which grew in profusion just back of the building. And they were none too soon for before they had finished the rain began to fall in large drops. But they had gathered enough to make fair beds and soon they were ready.

"They may lay kind of lumpy but I reckon they'll do," Bill said as he spread his blanket over the pile.

"We'd better roll the plane down a bit and get it under one of those trees," Gordon advised. "If it comes on to blow in the night it might get wrecked where it is now."

It took but a few minutes to locate a secure place for the plane beneath the branches of a large tree which would serve to break the wind and they returned to the cabin bringing the cells with them. Darkness fell rapidly and the storm increased in violence until by nine o'clock it was blowing a fair sized gale. But inside the cabin it was dry and the beds proved more comfortable than they had expected.

Some time in the night Gordon awoke with the feeling that something was wrong. The wind had

died to a gentle breeze but the rain was still falling and he could hear it on the roof. For several minutes he lay listening to Bill's regular breathing and knew that nothing had disturbed him. Had he really heard anything or was it just his imagination, he wondered. After listening a few minutes longer he decided that it was the latter and was about to turn over and go to sleep again, when he heard a sound which caused him to sit up with all his senses alert. The sound, which was unlike anything he had ever heard, seemed to come from a great distance, and was repeated a moment later and now from the opposite direction.

"What kind of a yell do you call that?" Bill asked as he too sat up.

"I thought you were asleep. Did you hear it?"

"Sure did. What is it?"

"Listen."

This time the cry was nearer and was answered almost immediately. Then from other directions it was taken up until it was almost incessant.

"They sure must have come queer animals in this part of the world," Gordon declared. "First we run into what you call dingos and and I suppose you'll be telling me that this is some kind of munkus."

"Those are human cries if I'm any judge," Bill told him.

"Well, it looks as though we were going to have callers, and not very long from now."

"Got your gun?"

"Sure."

"Good: Let's not use them unless we have to. Listen."

The cries changed and now sounded like a weird chant. Now it was so loud that it seemed to fill the air, and again it died away until they could hardly hear it.

"They don't seem to be coming any nearer," Bill said after a few minutes had passed.

"And they don't seem to be going away either," Gordon added.

"You know what I think it is?" Bill asked. "I think it's a lot of natives getting together for some kind of a ceremony. If they were after us they wouldn't have made so much noise."

"Maybe you're right. Shall we go out and take a look?"

"I think we'd better stay right where we are."

"How come? We might miss something worth seeing."

"And if they see us we might see something worth missing."

Gordon had stepped to the door and pushed it partly open. The rain had nearly ceased and, al-

though heavy clouds covered the sky it was not so dark but that he could see for several yards.

"They're down to the south of us," he announced.

"Well, here's hoping they don't come any nearer," Bill told him.

"Oh, come on, let's see what's up. It's dark enough so that they won't see us unless we get too close and we'll be careful not to do that."

"I don't——"

"Come on, I'm going."

Gordon slipped through the door and Bill followed, reiterating his advice against the move but in a tone that told Gordon that he wanted to go. The chanting was now so low that they could hardly hear it but they knew that it was coming from a spot not more than a few hundred yards distant. South of the cabin the woods began about a hundred feet from it and in a moment they had entered the forest and were creeping along careful not to make the slightest sound.

The darkness was more intense beneath the trees but still there was light enough to enable them to avoid the big trunks. As they advanced slowly and cautiously, stopping every few yards to listen, the sound of the chanting gradually became more plainly audible, and soon Gordon, who was leading

the way, stopped and waited for Bill to come up.

"We're nearly there, I'd say," he whispered.

"And, believe me, we want to be careful. If they get sight of us we'll wish we had taken my advice," Bill cautioned.

"They aren't going to see us," Gordon retorted as he started forward again.

He had not gone more than a dozen yards before he again stopped and, as Bill stepped close to his side, he pointed ahead. They had been going down hill most of the time since leaving the cabin and now they seemed to be standing on the edge of a sharp declivity. Down below them and seemingly only about fifty feet distant waving lights were visible through the trees. The chanting had stopped for the moment and not a sound was audible. Then the tones of a man's voice reached them and, although of course they could understand no word of what he said, it was plain that he was reciting a ritual of some sort.

"He's got that learned by heart all right," Bill whispered.

"I reckon it's some sort of a religious ceremony," Gordon suggested.

"Sounds like it. I wonder if we can get a bit closer."

"Sure, but watch your step; it's pretty steep here."

Gordon again led the way but it was so steep that he was obliged to dig his heels in the soft earth and hold himself back. Should either of them slip it was more than likely that they would be heard by some of the natives. About thirty feet from where they had stopped they reached a sort of shelf on the side of the hill and both agreed that they had gone as far as safety would permit. Indeed, they were not more than twenty feet from where the natives had gathered, and thanks to the blazing torches which they were carrying they could see without much difficulty nearly the entire crowd. They were in a small clearing about twenty feet in diameter and nearly round and they estimated that not less than a hundred men were there. So far as they could see there were no women or children.

In the center of the circle, standing on what appeared to be a pile of square stones about three feet high, was the man who was addressing the crowd. He held in one hand a blazing torch and in the other some object which they were unable to identify, but they judged it to be a weapon of some kind. In a few minutes he had finished his recital, and from the change in his attitude, they could tell that he was now explaining something, and the crowd seemed to be hanging with breathless interest on his words.

"Must be mighty important," Gordon whispered.

Then the speaker paused and from the south side of the circle ten men, naked save for a breech-cloth, advanced until they were within ten feet of the pile on which the speaker still stood. Each man carried in his left hand one of the torches and in his right what the boys believed to be a boomerang. Then the man on the pile spoke a few more words, after which he straightened himself up and raised both hands above his head.

For fully a minute the strange tableau continued unchanged. Then one of the ten stepped slightly to one side and hurled his boomerang at the man on the pile. The man ducked and the weapon flew over his head, described a complete circle and was caught by the thrower who at once turned and joined the crowd on the edge of the clearing. At the same time a murmur arose from the crowd but whether of approval or disapproval the boys were unable at the moment to decide. But the murmur ceased as another man stepped aside and hurled his weapon. This one came nearer hitting its target but failed and was caught by the man who had thrown it. Again the murmur and this time a bit louder. Again and again the act was repeated and the boys marveled both at the skill of the throwers and at the wonderful agility of the man on the pile. It seemed

each time that the club was going straight to its mark but each time the man dodged and escaped until seven boomerangs had missed him.

The eighth man was the largest of the ten and it seemed to the boys that he took a more deliberate aim and, although the man ducked with lightning quickness, the club seemed to turn from its course at just the right time and struck him a glancing blow on the right shoulder. But it evidently did no great harm for the man immediately straightened up with a look of disdain on his face. The boomerang fell to the ground close to the pile and the thrower was greeted with jeers as he stepped back into the crowd.

"Seems better to make a clean miss than to make that kind of a hit," Bill whispered.

The next man missed by a wide margin and now but one remained. This one threw from where he stood and so quick was his action that the weapon left his hand without any backward motion that the boys could see. And, quick as he was, the man on the pile was too slow this time, for the boomerang struck him squarely between the eyes and he dropped over backward and his body rolled to the ground. Instantly the crowd was galvanized into action and they rushed forward from all directions. What followed the boys were unable to see but from the

sound they judged that if the blow had not killed the man it would be but a matter of seconds before he would be torn to pieces. At any rate, it was over in a moment and the crowd, waving their torches and taking up the chant again, formed into a double line and in a short time had disappeared toward the south.

"And that's that," Gordon said as the last of the line left the clearing.

"But what's what? Bill asked as they started back up the hill.

"I'll bite."

"Well, it seems fairly clear to me."

"All right, Sherlock, what was it?"

"I'd say it was a trial. Evidently that man had done something and that's the way they settle such things. If he'd come through unharmed he'd have been innocent, but as it was, he was guilty."

"Poor fellow, he was almost innocent at that."

"But did you notice the speed of that last guy? What a pitcher he would make. He'd get the ball back over the plate before the batter knew what it was all about. Wonder where that gang hang out when they're at home."

"Probably not far away. It's a strange thing that we didn't see their village yesterday when we were flying over here."

"Must be a pretty small one and mighty well hidden, if you inquire from me."

"Well, we'll have to look it up today, but we'll be in the air when we do it."

"That gets my vote. Believe me, I'd hate to have to dodge one of those boomerangs let alone ten of them. They're bad medicine."

Dawn was just breaking in the east as they reached the cabin and they decided not to go to sleep again but to get an early breakfast and make a long day of it. They thought it best not to make a fire for fear the natives would see the smoke, so they used their little stove, which burned what is called canned heat, to make the coffee and contented themselves with a cold lunch otherwise.

"Now to see if we can locate that village," Bill said an hour later as he climbed to his seat. "It ought not to be very hard, as it must be pretty good sized."

CHAPTER IX.

UMBAGO

FOR more than an hour they flew back and forth in the near vicinity closely examining the ground below them, but no trace of a village was seen nor did they see a single native.

"It's mighty strange," Bill declared. "We searched all over within a radius of not less than ten miles and haven't seen a thing."

"Looks to me as though they'd crawled into a hole and pulled the hole in after them," Gordon added.

"Well, seeing that we didn't come here to hunt natives I suppose we'd better give it up and resume our search for Fred. But I would like to know the answer."

"And we'll find it before we leave for home if you let me have my way. But I agree with you that we'd better be on our way with our real job."

And before the day was ended they were about convinced that their failure to find the village was not to be the only disappointment of the expedition.

Stopping only long enough to eat their dinner, they spent the entire day in the air and when supper time came they were forced to admit that they had accomplished nothing of a positive nature. Gordon proposed that they fly back to the top of the mountain and spend another night in the cabin but Bill objected on the ground that the natives might have seen the plane and would be on the watch for it. So, shortly after six o'clock they landed near the edge of a small pond which was all but hidden between the hills.

"There may be trout in that pond and then again there may not be," Bill said as he jumped to the ground.

"We'll know the answer to that question before we're much older," Gordon assured him as he reached for his rod.

The answer was no so far as his efforts were concerned. He tried flies and when they failed to get a rise he dug a few worms. But they met with no better success and they were obliged to go without fresh fish for supper.

They were, they judged, about fifteen miles from the cabin where they had spent the night before and neither were entirely easy in mind. In spite of the fact that they had seen no natives during the day they knew there were at least a hundred not many

miles away and they had a feeling that they were not friendly toward white men. But neither put his fears into words and they crawled inside their pup tents as soon as it was dark.

But the night passed without any disturbance and neither awoke until the sun was an hour high.

"I've an idea that the tribe we saw night before last is the only gang of natives in these mountains," Bill declared as they were getting breakfast.

"How come?" Gordon asked.

"Well, we haven't seen any more and there aren't very many of them left on the island."

"And I'm beginning to think that we didn't really see them."

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe we dreamed it."

"Nonsense, two people don't dream the same thing at the same time."

"I suppose not, but it's mighty strange."

"It is all of——"

Bill did not finish the sentence for he was interrupted by a loud grunt and, looking up, they saw, standing about a dozen feet from them, a huge native, naked except for the breech-cloth, and in his hand were a number of the now familiar boom-erangs. He was not far from seven feet tall and possessed a beautifully formed body, while on his

face was a look of inquiry as though he had not quite made up his mind what manner of beings they were. Then his gaze wandered to the plane a few feet to the right of the boys and now a slight scowl took the place of the half grin.

"Steady," Bill whispered as Gordon's hand reached for his revolver which happened to be lying on a stone close by. "He doesn't look hostile."

"Don't take any chances, though," Gordon whispered as he drew back his band.

Bill got slowly to his feet and held out both hands in token of friendship and the grin returned to the native's face. He took a step forward and then stopped and again glanced toward the plane. Evidently he did not trust the plane. The boys he could in a measure understand but the *Albatross* was something entirely outside of his experience. He drew back a step and shifted one of the clubs to his right hand and this time Gordon reached out and grasped his automatic.

But Bill smiled, pointed to the plane and shook his head. He was trying to make the native understand that it was harmless and a moment later he was convinced that he had succeeded, for the black took a couple of steps toward him and shifted the boomerang back to the other hand. At the same time Bill stepped forward and the two stood not more

than four feet apart and, for a moment, looked at each other grinning. Then Bill reached out his hand and slowly the black advanced his to meet it.

And so they shook hands although Bill did all the shaking. But the black seemed to understand that here were friends and, as Bill dropped his hand he placed it on the boy's head and mumbled a few words which sounded as though he were invoking a blessing upon him. Then Gordon came forward and offered his hand, which was accepted, after which he too had a huge hand placed on his head and the same words were spoken.

The menu that morning consisted of flap jacks and coffee and as soon as the greeting was over, Bill made it known by gestures that they expected him to eat with them. As soon as he had put the idea over the native accepted and for all of a half hour they baked flap jack after flap jack and poured cup after cup of coffee for their guest. Fortunately, they had several packages of the flap jack flour and plenty of condensed milk.

"This fellow must be hollow clear down to his toes," Gordon declared as he mixed up another batch of cakes. "If he stays with us long we'll all starve."

"Guess he never ate flap jacks before," Bill chuckled.

But at last the giant rubbed his stomach and shook his woolly head, gestures which the two boys took to mean that he had eaten all he wanted. Gordon gave a sigh of relief and began cleaning up while Bill picked up one of the boomerangs which the native had laid on the ground. It was very heavy for its size and he knew it was made of some kind of wood which was very hard. He made a motion as though he was about to throw it and handed it to their guest. He took it in his huge hand with a broad grin and then, with a movement so rapid that they were unable to follow it, he sent the club sailing through the air and out over the pond. It seemed to go on in a nearly straight line for some distance, then described a graceful arc and, with seemingly undiminished speed, returned to be caught by the hand that threw it. Then, after pointing to a bush which grew close to the edge of the pond and bore a single flower about the size of a coffee cup, on the tip of the highest branch, he again let go the club, seemingly without taking aim. Through the air it sped until it was almost over the bush, and then gave a sudden swoop downward, neatly clipped the flower from its stem and again returned to its owner.

"Can you beat it?" Gordon gasped.

"Probably not," Bill chuckled.

"It would have been a good thing for that trial victim if this fellow had been the first one to have a try at him. Saved him the trouble of dodging nine times."

For nearly a half hour the native entertained them with his marvelous skill, and when Gordon made plain his desire to try throwing one of the clubs, he showed him how to hold it and tried to explain the motion of the arm necessary to produce the desired result. But the result, as he afterward declared, was a total loss. To be sure he threw the stick with a good bit of speed but it failed to make the least attempt to come back. A dozen times he tried it while Bill laughed heartily at his efforts.

"Let's see you do it, smarty," Gordon finally ordered, handing the club to Bill.

But Bill's efforts were but little more successful. To be sure, after several attempts, he made the boomerang fly in a curve, but, as Gordon chuckled, it was a very much open curve.

"I reckon it takes considerable practice," Bill declared as he handed the club back to the native.

"I believe you're right at that," Gordon chuckled.

The native had said a good many things while he had been with them, in fact, he was very talkative, but of course they were unable to understand a word. Several times he had pointed to himself and

grunted, as nearly as they could spell it, umbago. They decided that he was trying to tell them his name and he appeared delighted when they repeated it after him. Then, pointing to himself Bill pronounced his own name several times and then Gordon did the same. The savage repeated the names although he spoke them with such an accent that they would have had difficulty in understanding them had they not known in advance what he was trying to say. But nevertheless they could now call each other by name and that was something.

"I do wish we could ask him if he's ever seen another white boy," Gordon declared.

"I've been trying to work out a means for doing it but haven't succeeded," Bill told him.

All during the visit the giant had from time to time cast anxious eyes in the direction of the plane and it was evident that he still was suspicious of it. So Bill took him by the hand and led him up to where he could touch it. As he drew near to the *Albatross* Bill could see that he was trembling violently and he tried to reassure him by shaking his head and laughing. Finally he took the man's hand and placed it on one of the wings although it took all his strength to do so as the native was plainly scared. But with the contact much of his fright seemed to vanish and he burst into a torrent of

words. He had probably thought that the plane was a live thing until his touch told him that he was mistaken.

"Let's show him how it works," Gordon suggested.

"All right" Bill agreed. "Get the cells."

So, a moment later, they started the motor and the native's eyes nearly popped from his head as the plane rose in the air. Bill guided the plane in a circle out over the pond and returned, bringing it down slowly and in exactly the spot from which he had started. He wished to show the man that he could do as well with the plane as he had done with the boomerang. So excited was the native that he danced up and down in front of the machine uttering strange words and waving his huge arms above his head.

Then by motions they got the idea across that they wanted him to get in the plane, but here he balked and no amount of urging could avail. They tried all sorts of arguments but it was no use, he simply would not get into it and finally they were obliged to give it up. Then a strange thing happened. The boys began taking down their tents and, for a moment, both had their backs turned to their new friend, and when they looked up he had vanished.

For a moment they looked at each other too astonished to speak. It seemed impossible that he could have gotten out of sight so quickly but somehow he had accomplished it as they proved to their satisfaction by looking behind the plane which offered the only hiding place available.

"Wonder if this is another dream?" Bill finally said.

"If it was it was a good one," Gordon replied.

"But his vanishing stuff is beginning to get a bit on my nerves. First that whole tribe disappear from the face of the earth and then that giant just naturally dissolves into thin air and first thing we know one or the other of us will be following suit."

"Maybe, but I still feel pretty substantial."

"But where could he have gone? I know I didn't have my eyes off him for more than ten seconds at a time."

"Search me, but he's gone. Wonder if we'll see him again."

"I'm betting we will. Do you suppose he belongs to that tribe?"

"He wasn't at the ceremonies the other night. At least I didn't see him."

"And you couldn't very well have missed him," Bill told him as he finished rolling his tent.

"Well, life seems to be just one thing after another. Wonder what'll happen next?"

The next thing of moment that happened came about two hours later as they were flying low over a deep ravine between two mountains. They were some ten miles from where they had spent the night and well over on the eastern side of the range. Bill was at the wheel and Gordon was using the glass, and suddenly he announced that there was a hut of some kind just beneath them. So Bill circled the plane around until they had picked out a landing place, and a few minutes later they came down beside a small stream which flowed swiftly between two mountains so close together that there was barely room for the plane to land.

"How far do you think we are from it?" Bill asked as he got to the ground.

"It's up stream from here and I'd say three or four hundred yards, maybe more, it's pretty hard to tell."

"Let's hide the cells in a safe place before we leave the plane unless you think one of us had better stay here and watch it."

"Suppose you stay while I go and see what it is. I can't get lost and probably it'll amount to nothing."

"Suits me."

So Bill got back into his seat and Gordon, after slipping his revolver into his pocket, started up stream. It was very hard going as the stream, for the most part, was lined with a thick growth of bushes of a species new to him, and at times he was forced to literally push his way through them. On them grew a sharp spine nearly two inches long and he had to be very careful to avoid them. Fortunately they did not grow very close together, but he pricked himself several times before he had gone a hundred feet. But it was not the first time he had made his way over rough going and he pushed on as rapidly as possible under the circumstances. Fortunately the bushes were not continuous and at intervals there were open places where he could, in a measure, make up for the time it took him to work his way through the thick clumps.

But at best his progress was slow and fully twenty minutes passed before he began to wonder if he hadn't come about far enough. He had, from the plane, caught barely more than a glimpse of the hut and, when another fifteen minutes passed, he was asking himself if he might not have been mistaken. He knew that what he had seen and thought was a hut was on that side of the stream and but a few feet from it so he was practically certain that he had not passed it.

He had come, so far as he was able to judge, about six hundred yards and now he decided that he would keep on for another fifteen minutes and then go back unless he found it. So he plunged on, pushing his way through the thick bushes and keeping his eyes open for a sight of something to tell him that he had found that for which he was seeking. Then, just as the fifteen minutes were almost up, he came to an open spot and saw that about twenty feet from the stream a small leanto had been built, mostly of the branches of trees. It was not more than ten feet square and the front was open, but it had been occupied and not many days previously.

In one corner was a bed consisting simply of coarse grass covered with a dirty and very much worn blanket. Two boxes evidently served as chairs and a rough home-made table completed the furnishings with the exception of a sort of cupboard which stood in the corner opposite from the bed. It held a few dishes of tin and a few cans of food unopened. Evidently all the cooking had been done outside, and going around back, he found a rude sort of stove built of flat stones.

What convinced him that the hut had been recently occupied was a pan of biscuits which he had found in the cupboard. They were hard, to be

sure, but not in the least mouldy, and he knew that in that climate at that time of year a few days would suffice to produce mould on bread.

Then he glanced toward the brook and all around but was unable to see the least thing which would indicate that the occupant had been engaged in mining. But this did not greatly surprise him, as he reasoned that the mine might be some distance from the place. He had now been gone nearly an hour and knew that Bill would be getting anxious. So he started back and arrived puffing to find Bill fast asleep in his seat in the plane. A touch served to arouse him and Gordon told him what he had found.

"Good," Bill said when he had finished. "And we can fly there?"

"Sure we can. What I can't understand is why we didn't land there in the first place and save me that trip. Believe me, it was some journey."

"It's too bad we didn't go a bit farther up before we came down and then we wouldn't have missed it. But it does seem funny that we didn't see it before."

Ten minutes later the plane settled down in front of the shack and they at once set about making a more thorough investigation. But they found nothing of any account, no tools or anything which

indicated mining operations. Nor did they find anything to indicate that Fred Green had been the occupant of the hut. However, Bill agreed with Gordan's opinion that the biscuits had been made not more than three or four days before.

"But whoever was here must have been here for something," Bill insisted. "And after we get through dinner we've got to find out what that something was, or had you rather wait awhile for dinner?"

"Fool question number three thousand two hundred and twenty-four," Gordon grinned as he began unpacking the plane.

"Well, I reckon he won't care if we use his stove if we leave it in good order. I'll have a fire going in a jiffy and you might get a trout or two out of that stream."

Gordon got four weighing about a half pound each and they were a very welcome addition to Bill's biscuits.

The shack stood in an open space of not more than a quarter acre area. Thirty feet back of it rose the steep side of the mountain, while just across the brook in front was another mountain. A number of foot prints found in the hard soil about the hut made it certain that the former occupant had not been a native, for it was plain that they had been

made by a shoe or boot. And besides it was most unlikely, as Bill pointed out, that a native would have had any canned goods in his larder. Nor did the hut in the least resemble any of the native huts they had seen.

"We'll hide the cells where they'll be safe, and then we'll have a wider look around," Bill said as he finished the last of the trout.

"And I've a very well developed hunch that we're going to find something," Gordon added, starting for the brook with his dish.

"Well, that's fine and here's hoping that it works."

Fifteen minutes later they had everything ready, the dishes washed and the precious cells so securely hidden that there was little danger that anyone would find them, and they were ready to start on a more extended search.

CHAPTER X.

CLUES

THE stream, where it flowed past the camp, was about eight feet wide and the current was very swift. On the other side the mountain rose so abruptly that it would have been very difficult to make one's way along the stream. But on their side they found a well defined path leading against the current and only a few feet away from the water. This passage way had been cut through the thick bushes which were some twelve feet tall and thickly studded with the sharp spikes.

"Whoever made this path has used it a lot," Bill declared as they paused at the entrance.

"And it took him some time to make it," Gordon added.

About fifty feet from where the path began they found a narrow space cut at one side of the path and Bill, who was leading the way, stopped with a low cry of surprise.

"Look," he ordered, "here's where he kept his horse."

The ground was hard but in spite of it they could make out the marks of the foot prints of a horse, and the discovery caused them considerable excitement.

"Fred had a horse," Gordon declared.

"But there's been two horses here. Some of the prints are quite a lot larger than the others."

"Well, maybe he had two. He most likely would coming all this distance from the town back there. He must have brought a good supply of food stuff along with him."

"And used one for a pack horse?"

"Sure. He couldn't have taken very much on the horse he was riding."

They spent ten or fifteen minutes searching for clues to the identity of the man who had been there before them, but they found nothing more. However, the discovery that he had had a horse gave them encouragement and they pushed on up stream more eagerly. And before they had gone a hundred feet they found the mine. Bursting from a particularly thick clump of bushes they saw before them, where the stream widened out to a considerable extent, several implements of the gold-digger's trade. About ten feet from the edge of the stream was a wooden bowl and beside it a pick and shovel. Primitive utensils to be sure, but there could be no

doubt regarding their use. And then too they could see that a large amount of the dirt of the stream's bed had been worked over.

"And he's found some gold here," Gordon declared, handing the bowl to Bill. "See those little yellow specks there."

"They're gold, all right," Bill agreed. "Just a minute now and we'll see if he has found it in any considerable quantity. I don't pretend to be an expert at this game but I've read how it's done."

While talking Bill had been taking off his shoes and stockings and now he waded into the stream until he had reached the center. Here he used the shovel to scoop up some of the dirt and waded ashore with the bowl half full. Then, filling it nearly full of water, he began to give it a circular motion, spilling some of the water over the edge. This he repeated several times and each time some of the dirt was carried over the edge with the water until not more than a handful remained. Eagerly they bent over to examine their result, but not a trace of the precious metal could they detect.

"You're a punk miner, if you ask me," Gordon declared as he straightened up. "Here, let your uncle have a try at it."

Gordon, having removed his shoes and stockings, took the bowl and shovel a few yards farther up

the stream and, having filled the former, imitated Bill's procedure. A moment later he gave a cry of exultation as he picked from the bowl three lumps of gold the size of peas.

"You've got to know how to do this sort of thing," he crowed as he held them out to Bill.

"Well, I guess you know how, all right. See if you can do it again."

Four times Gordon washed the gravel from the pan and each time was rewarded with from one to six nuggets, though none of them were larger than a good sized pea.

"I'll tell the world he's struck it rich," he declared as he began pulling on his stockings.

"It does look that way," Bill agreed. "But the question is, where is he?"

"Well, if we can't track a couple of horses we're not so good as I've always supposed."

"But I don't like to leave the plane for a very long time."

"No need of it: let's take it with us."

"But we can't do that. It'll——"

"One of us can do the trailing and the other can keep just over his head in the plane. Then, if anything happens, we'll have it handy for a get-away."

"And we've got the only plane in the world that can do a thing like that."

It was, by this time, nearly four o'clock and, after some discussion, they decided to delay the start until morning. It was certain, Bill pointed out, that they would not be able to catch up with their quarry before dark and it would be a good plan to make an even more thorough search of the immediate vicinity. So, for a couple of hours before eating their supper and until dark after the meal, they searched every inch of the hut and the ground about it but without accomplishing anything. Not a single article of clothing or of anything to give them a clue had the former occupant left behind him. Both of them, however, felt much encouraged by what they had found and were fairly confident that they were on the right track.

The night was cool and they kept a good fire going until they were ready to go to bed. Bill had just thrown a big log on the fire and turned back toward the hut when Gordon asked:

"Did you hear that?"

"I heard something. What do you think it was?"

"Listen, there it is again. Sounds like some kind of a drum."

"That's what I thought."

The sound was far off and did not seem to be coming any nearer but in a few minutes it was almost incessant. The boys remembered having

read stories of natives in different parts of the country who beat drums, which they called tom toms, as a part of certain ceremonies, and they agreed that in all probability that was what was taking place.

"But I didn't know they had that kind of native in Australia," Gordon said. "Anyhow I reckon it doesn't have anything to do with us. They're a good ways off and don't seem to be coming any nearer."

"Here's hoping," Bill replied. "I've heard that a sound like that carries a long distance."

"It's probably that same gang we saw the other night."

"Wouldn't wonder."

Gordon went to sleep almost at once, but Bill lay awake for a long time listening to the weird sound which never stopped. But it came no nearer and finally he too drifted off to the land of Nod. He awoke once during the night and for a few minutes listened, but the sound of drums had ceased and he soon went to sleep again.

They were up at daybreak and shortly after six o'clock were ready for the start. They had decided that Bill should take the first turn in the plane, so Gordon struck off up stream with the *Albatross* moving slowly through the air only a few feet over

his head. Just above the spot where the mining had been carried on the path was blotted out but the bushes were here much less dense and the going was not hard. There was no difficulty in following the trail left by the two horses and he pushed on, making very good time. By the time they had covered a matter of two miles the bushes had vanished altogether and a broad plateau stretched before them. They had left the stream a mile or more back and Gordon had been going up hill ever since.

The plateau, covering an area of perhaps four or five square miles, was thickly strewn with rocks of all sizes and, save for small patches of the coarse grass, nothing grew on it. Altogether it was, as Gordon declared, about as desolate a looking place as could be imagined.

"Talk about the country God forgot," he called out to Bill, who was only a few feet over his head, "do you suppose He ever even saw this place?"

"It's not exactly a Garden of Eden," Bill called back.

In the distance in front of them they could see the mountain where they had spent the night in the camp and it looked as though the trail might lead them very near it. When they were about half way **across** the plain Bill brought the *Albatross* down and insisted that Gordon take his place. It

had been a hard tramp and he had hurried and so did not need much urging.

"We might as well make short shifts of it," Bill explained, "and we'll make better time in the end."

As they advanced the ground became more thickly covered with rocks and at times Bill was hard put to find the trail as many yards often intervened between the foot prints. They were about two-thirds of the way across when Bill suddenly came to a stop and looked about him in surprise.

"What is it?" Gordon called down.

"Been a fight here," Bill replied. "Land right over there, we've got to look into this."

Gordon brought the plane down on a smooth spot about a hundred feet from where Bill was standing and hurried to his side. At this place the rocks were mostly of large size and the soil between them was of a sandy character which readily retained foot marks, and the prints of naked feet were plainly visible. Also, in several places, the sand bore mute evidence of the fact that the horses had done a good deal of plunging about as though badly frightened. Then Bill found a boomerang, close to a large rock, with one end badly chipped from its contact with the harder surface. And a moment later Gordon called attention to a number of dark

stains, on the side of another rock, which he declared were blood stains.

"Looks as though they got him," he said.

"Looks as though somebody got somebody, and that's a fact," Bill agreed.

"And it's almost certain that the one that was got was the fellow we're after. There must have been a dozen or more of the natives and it doesn't stand to reason that one man got them all."

"Those stains, if they are blood, are not very recent, three or four days old I'd say."

"I guess you're right there."

"And it means that we've got to be mighty careful. Those natives are not friendly to white men from the looks of things and if they get hold of us we're apt to find ourselves in very hot water."

"To say the least. But we've got the good old *Albatross* and I don't imagine they've any anti-aircraft guns."

"No, we're safe enough as long as we can get to the plane before they get to us, but we've got to be sure we can do that little thing. Gee, but I'm glad we brought it along with us."

"The only thing about it that I don't like is that they can see it so easily and we can't help it. It's a thousand to one shot that they've seen it already."

"Probably, but we can't help it, as you say. It's

our one best bet in spite of that and we'll stick pretty close to it."

"Close is right."

For some minutes they searched the ground all about for any clue but nothing was found beyond that already mentioned, and they determined to go on. It was now even more certain that the trail was leading them to the mountain where they had witnessed the trial and it was not more than a mile away.

"Keep your eyes open," Bill cautioned as Gordon climbed into the cockpit.

As they approached the edge of the plateau they saw that the mountain rose very abruptly and the foot of it was heavily wooded, the trees beginning about two hundred feet in front of the mountain itself.

"Stay where you are a minute," Gordon called down when they were about three hundred yards from the woods. "I'm going up a bit."

Stopping the forward propeller he increased the speed of the elevator and the plane rose vertically until it was some fifteen hundred feet up. There he brought it to a stop and Bill could see that he was using the glass.

"See anything?" Bill asked when Gordon had brought the plane almost down to the ground.

"Sure did," Gordon told him "I saw where that tribe live and why we didn't find the village before. It's right over there close to the mountain, and the reason we didn't find it is because you couldn't see it from any other place than where I was. A hundred feet to either side and you couldn't see a thing of it."

By this time Gordon had brought the plane to the ground and Bill was leaning on the edge of the cockpit.

"You see," Gordon continued, "the mountain overhangs for a distance of two hundred feet or more and makes what you might call a big cave and that's where the village is. The trees almost meet in front of it and on all sides so one might fly within a short distance of it a dozen times and never see it. I don't know what made me suspect it, but I did and that's why I went up."

"Did you see any natives?"

"Come to think of it, I didn't."

"How large a village is it?"

"Well, I'd say there were sixty or seventy huts and the cave covers an area of about four acres or a little more."

"Funny there wasn't anyone in sight."

"Does seem so, but what I'd like to know is whether or not they've seen the plane."

"I feel about as helpless as a mud turtle with a sore back. What can we do? If we go any nearer in the plane they'll most certainly see us if they haven't already, and we don't dare leave the plane."

"I wonder if they're superstitious."

"More or less, probably. I guess all natives are. Got an idea?"

"Not a glimmer except that if they've never seen a plane or heard of one we might scare them."

"Well, we might's well be eating while we have the chance," Bill said.

"You certainly do say some sensible things," Gordon grinned as he jumped to the ground. "Guess we'll have to eat it cold, though."

"Yes, I don't think we'd better make a fire, although it probably wouldn't do a bit of harm, for I've a hunch they're watching us right this minute."

"Let's not risk it anyhow," Gordon advised.

"It seems to me that we have just two courses to choose from," Bill declared a little later while they were eating their lunch. "We can wait till dark and then sneak through the woods and see what—well, what we can see, I guess."

"What's the other bet?" Gordon asked as he paused.

"Why, we can, of course, get in the plane and fly low over the village and perhaps find out something.

By the way, could we do that? Could we get the plane down close enough?"

"Well, it would take pretty careful manipulating but I reckon it could be done. But what I don't see is what good it would do. Suppose we did it and found out that he is there. We know that already, that is, we're pretty sure of it. I don't suppose they'd throw him up to us, and it would sure be a dead give-away as regards our presence."

"Then you think the first plan is the better?"

"I think it's the only sensible one. It gives us a chance and the other doesn't."

"I agree with you, but we've got to take into consideration that it's the dangerous one."

"Of course it is, but you've got to take a chance in a game of this sort. And besides it isn't the first time we've taken a chance, you know."

"And let's hope it'll not be the last. All right, then, if it's agreed that we're going to wait till it gets dark what are we going to do in the mean time?"

"Just mark time, I reckon."

Never had an afternoon seemed so long. They did each take a short nap while the other kept watch but neither could sleep for more than an hour as they had had a good night's sleep the night before. But, as Bill said, everything comes to an end at last

except a circle, and finally supper time arrived and then it was not long before it began to get dark. About five o'clock the sky had clouded over and they hoped that it would remain cloudy as the darker it was the better their chances of remaining undiscovered.

Both boys realized that they were up against an extremely dangerous proposition, but they had come there to find Fred Green and it never occurred to either of them to turn back until they had done all they could toward accomplishing their mission. They would take no unnecessary risks but if the risk were necessary they would never turn their backs on it.

They had, during the afternoon, discussed the idea of one going alone, leaving the other to guard the plane, but had finally decided against it. The fact was that neither could bear the thought of the other going into great danger alone. So, shortly after nine o'clock, they were ready to start. Although it was still cloudy it was not totally dark and they had little trouble in picking their way between the rocks. They had covered about half the distance to the forest when they again heard the sound to which they had listened the night before. And now it was much louder, leaving no doubt but that it came from the village.

"Hello, the concert has started," Bill chuckled.

"Wonder if they do it every night?" Gordon said as he stopped a moment to listen.

Beginning with a beat every few seconds the intervals between grew shorter until it seemed there must be fully a dozen drums taking part.

"I think we'd better stay right here till they quit it," Gordon suggested. "We don't want to hit the village till they've gone to bed."

"My idea exactly," Bill agreed.

So they sat down on the ground and for a long time listened to the monotonous sound which continued without interruption for over an hour. Then the beats began to slow down and finally ceased altogether.

"Show's over," Gordon declared.

"But we'll have to give them an hour to get to sleep."

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE HUNT

IT WAS a quarter past eleven o'clock when the boys again started toward the village. The stars were still obscured by heavy clouds although no rain had fallen and there was no wind. During the last half hour they had heard no sound save the chirping of insects and two or three times the howl of a distant dingo. Of course, each had his automatic in his pocket and each had taken a small flash light although they doubted if they would dare use them.

Finally they reached the woods and found, as they had feared, an almost impenetrable undergrowth between the lofty trees. They spent some time searching for a path for they reasoned that there must be at least one running from the open place to the village. But if there were they were unable to find it and at last gave it up and plunged in. The undergrowth consisted largely of a kind of vine which stretched between the trunks of the trees and was very strong, making their progress painfully slow. Many times they were forced to

crawl beneath the vine on their hands and knees. Still they knew the distance was not long and not once did they get discouraged.

Foot by foot they forced their way through the forest, stopping every few minutes to listen. But they heard no sound to alarm them and shortly after twelve o'clock Bill, who was in the lead, saw through the thick undergrowth, the dull gleam of a fire and knew that they were close to the village.

"We're here," he whispered to Gordon who was close behind him.

"Hear anything?"

"Not a thing. Now you stay right here while I—"

"We go together and don't you forget it," Gordon interrupted.

"But—"

"Now don't waste time arguing about it. You know I won't let you go alone."

"All right. Keep close to me."

"You bet."

The next minute Bill stepped out of the woods and stood not more than twenty feet from the fire the gleam of which he had seen. The fire had died down until only a huge bed of glowing coals remained but they were bright enough to give considerable light and he could see that the nearest of

the huts was about thirty feet on the other side of the fire.

They had read and heard that natives are usually light sleepers and realized that they must make absolutely no noise. Possibly these natives slept soundly but the chances were against it and they knew that silence was their only hope of safety. So, after pausing a moment to listen, they stole around the fire and reached a position directly behind the nearest of the huts. This hut was built very much after the manner of the others they had seen and was about ten feet wide by twelve long, the bark roof being not more than seven feet from the ground. Just what they had hoped to accomplish by invading the village probably neither of the boys could have explained. Of course in their minds had been the hope that in some way they might be able to locate the man they were trying to find but, as they stood there in the darkness and silence, they felt again their helplessness. If they only knew in which of the many huts he was confined the problem would be more simple, but to go around searching one after the other was, of course, out of the question.

The huts were built with only a few feet intervening between them and there had been no attempt at any degree of regularity. There were no streets

between them and the arrangement was haphazard in the extreme. As they pressed their ears close to the wall of the hut they could plainly hear deep breathing and by the sound judged that several people were sleeping within.

"He's probably in a hut by himself," Bill whispered, his lips close to Gordon's ear.

"And a white man doesn't make a noise like that," Gordon whispered back.

So they moved noiselessly to the next hut and again listened. Here it was plainly audible that more than one sleeper was within and they moved to the next. For more than an hour they continued in this way stopping by each hut until they were convinced that it held more than one. They knew that they would probably miss more than one in the darkness and lack of order, but that could not be helped.

"There must be quite a lot of people in this tribe," Gordon whispered. "Every one of these huts seems to be full up."

"Two or three hundred I'd say," Bill replied.

They were now well over on the other side of the village and very close to the wall of the mountain. Over their heads reared the rocky side of the cliff and here the darkness was more intense, in fact they could hardly see a foot ahead. Bill had counted the

huts as they had paused by each and was up to forty-nine and he doubted if they had covered more than half of them. Then they reached a hut which gave forth no sound and their hearts beat rapidly at the thought that perhaps they had succeeded.

"You stay here and I'll go in," Bill whispered.

But at that moment came a startling interruption. From a point a short distance to their right came a sharp cry followed almost instantly by others in different parts of the village.

"Quick, now, follow me and keep close to the wall of the mountain," Bill whispered as he darted off.

A few steps brought them to the wall and, keeping one hand against it, they stole along as rapidly as they dared being careful to make no sound which might betray them. That the entire village was now awake was evidenced by the cries and shouts which filled the air. Fortunately none of the huts were built very close to the wall and they knew that even a native could not see far in that darkness. But now torches began to flare up here and there throughout the village and they knew that they must reach the farther edge of the village very soon or they would be discovered.

"We'll have to go faster," Bill whispered. "Here, take my hand."

They had gone two hundred feet or more when,

without warning, Bill bumped into someone who was coming in the opposite direction. The encounter was undoubtedly as much a surprise to the native as to Bill for he gave vent to a startled grunt as he fell back. But Bill, although scared nearly out of his wits, as he afterward confessed, did not lose his head. Bending over he leaped forward and his head caught the other fairly in the stomach and he went down gasping for breath.

"Quick, now," Bill whispered as he started to run again.

But evidently the man had quickly recovered for they had not gone a dozen feet before he was shouting and his shouts were being answered.

"Never mind the noise now," Bill muttered as he increased his speed.

But the darkness was so intense they did not dare, even although they knew that the entire village was after them, to run at full speed. Still they made good time and reached the end of the village with their pursurers still some distance behind them.

"Now we've got to root hog or get caught," Bill said as he plunged into the forest. "Never mind the scratches."

"On your tracks," Gordon told him.

Fortunately for them the vines here were not so thick as further down where they had entered and

they were able to make better time. Still their progress was slow and, from the sounds behind them, they realized that their followers were gaining rapidly. That push through the dense forest with the angry pack almost on their heels, seemed like a nightmare to them. At times it seemed that they were making no progress at all, but they finally reached the edge of the woods with the natives still behind them.

And just then the moon peeped out from a rift in the clouds giving sufficient light for them to run at full speed without danger of hitting a rock. And they did run. But before they had covered half the distance to the plane shouts from behind told them that their pursuers had sighted them.

"Hit it up, Bill," Gordon panted close to his heels and Bill put on a fresh burst of speed although it had seemed to him that he was running as fast as he possibly could before.

Neither had paused to look behind them knowing that to do so would be to lose time without doing any good. But they knew that at least one of the natives was gaining on them, and just before they reached the plane, a boomerang flashed past them and struck a big rock. Fortunately they had not removed the cells from the plane having decided it would be useless to do so and now they thanked their

lucky stars that they had. As it was the leading native was only about thirty feet behind them when they leaped into the cockpit. Bill threw the switch even before he sank into his seat and, as the elevator began to spin the native stopped. Then, as the plane left the ground, he turned and fled with a startled cry.

"Better give him a good scare," Gordon said as Bill started the forward propeller.

By this time the native had joined several others and they were now standing close together with their eyes fixed on the plane. The plane, having gained an altitude of a hundred feet or more, now darted toward them and they threw themselves to the ground covering their faces with their hands. As the plane passed over them only a few feet from the ground Gordon emptied his automatic into the air at the same time letting out an Indian war whoop.

"Reckon that'll hold 'em awhile," he chuckled as the plane swooped upward.

"But, boy, we had a pretty close call," Bill reminded him.

"Don't I know it? And the worst of it is it didn't get us a thing."

"Well, we did all we could and so we need have

no regrets. But I would like to know what gave us away."

"I've been thinking of that and it's a mystery to me. I'll swear we didn't make a single sound."

"Well, it's just one more mystery and we'll probably never know the answer."

"Where are we going now?"

"Might as well go back to the mine. It's light enough with that moon to see to light there alright and I don't think they'll follow us."

"They're beating it back toward the village," Gordon said leaning over the side. "But I'd go over the mountain and come back around behind it. No use in telling them where we're going."

Bill considered it good advice and swung the plane around and a moment later it passed over the village high up and on over the mountain. Then, coming down behind it he turned again and, flying low, they were soon back over the mine and a moment later were on the ground.

"The end of a very imperfect day if you ask me," Gordon sighed as he got out.

"None of that now," Bill snapped. "We ought to be thankful that we came out as well as we did."

"Of course, only I wish we had found him."

"We'll find him if he's here," Bill consoled him as he turned toward the shack. "In the meantime

we might as well get some sleep. Tomorrow's another day."

"Guess we'll have to try the other plan seeing that this one didn't work," Gordon said as he threw himself down.

"You mean go in the plane?"

"Sure, what else?"

"If we could only talk their lingo we might do something, but how can we make them understand what we're after?"

"Ask me something easy. Good night."

Somewhat to their surprise there was no sound from the drums that night and, although Bill did not go to sleep until well toward midnight, he heard no sound to cause alarm. It was unusual for him to remain awake for a longer period than a few minutes after getting to bed, but tonight he had so much to think of that for a long time sleep refused to come to him. Nevertheless he was up first in the morning and had breakfast well under way before Gordon joined him.

"Well, how does it look to you by daylight?" Gordon asked while they were eating.

"Not so good."

"You mean you don't think we'd better try it?"

"No, not that. It's the only thing I can think of to do except stay here and twiddle our thumbs, but

I don't see how it's going to accomplish anything."

"Nor I, but I agree with you that it's the only thing we can do."

"It's going to take some mighty fine manipulating to get the plane in there and to hold it while we're there," Bill mused as they were cleaning up.

"Better put in new cells," Gordon advised. "We don't want one of them to go back on us."

"You bet we'll take every precaution possible," Bill assured him.

A half hour later and they had set out for the second time to invade the hostile village and it must be acknowledged that neither of them were in high spirits, or had much hope of success.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUE

As Gordon had explained the day before the location of the village was most unique. The rocky side of the mountain reached out at the top far enough to cover nearly half of the settlement and lofty trees in front reared their tops to about the same height leaving an opening between the forest and mountain of not much more than a hundred feet in width, and one had to be almost directly over it to see the village at all. With an ordinary plane the idea would have been an absurdity but with the *Albatross* that part of it was not what was worrying them. They had little doubt about being able to manage the plane but even so they could see little hope of success.

For a moment the plane hovered over the open space between the trees and the mountain while the boys gazed at the village below. Although it was well after seven o'clock and the sun was several hours high not a soul was to be seen.

"Gee, but those people must sleep most of the time," Gordon declared. "I didn't see anyone when I was up here yesterday afternoon."

"Must be late to bed and late to rise that makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise with them," Bill smiled.

"But look over there," Gordon cried excitedly pointing toward the lower end of the open space. "See those two horses tied to that little tree?"

"You're right, and it leaves no doubt regarding their having someone."

"Can you pick out that hut where we didn't hear any snores?"

"Not for sure but it was not far from the center of the town so far as the up and down of it goes, and it was pretty close to the wall. At any rate there wasn't any other between it and the mountain, I'm sure of that."

"Well, let's go."

Bill allowed the plane to sink slowly through the opening until it floated only a few yards above the collection of huts, and still there was no sign of human life.

"Move her over to that hut and maybe we'll hear something," Gordon said in a low voice.

Bill started the forward propeller and swung the nose of the plane around and like a silent ghost it

moved to the other side of the village until it was directly over the hut they had selected as being the right one to the best of their judgment. Still not a soul had appeared.

"I believe it would be safe to land and take a peep inside that hut," Gordon whispered.

"And I believe it wouldn't," Bill whispered back. "Remember those fellows can move with a good 'deal of speed when they get going and they'd have us before we knew what had happened. No, think of something else, I'll take a chance but not as a big a one as that."

"All right, how's this? Let her down a bit and then we'll yell his name and if he's there he'll answer and we'll know it. Of course it'll wake the tribe if they're still asleep, but it may give us something definite to go on."

"Thing I'm afraid of is that it may make them kill him if they know for sure that we're trying to rescue him."

"Yes, I'd thought of that, but I reckon they know that already."

"Well, I can't say I like it very much but I can't think of anything better."

So Bill brought the plane down still lower until it was only about a dozen feet above the hut and at the top of his voice Gordon shouted:

"Fred Green, Fred Green, Fred Green, are you there?"

For an instant only the faint echo of the shout answered them. Then, from a hut a bit to the right of the plane, came a voice trembling in its eagerness: "Who is calling?"

But before they could shout again pandimonium broke loose and from every hut naked savages poured out. For a second they gazed about trying to locate the cause of the disturbance and, catching sight of the plane, with one accord they threw themselves to the ground.

But a moment later they were again on their feet evidently considering that they had done their full duty in prostrating themselves before this strange god or whatever it was.

"If we could only speak their lingo," Bill groaned as he leaned over the side of the cockpit.

"Perhaps we can make them understand by signs," Gordon suggested. "But first let me call to him again. Fred Green, is it you in the hut?"

"Yes, who are you?"

At last the great question was settled so far as the identity of the captive was concerned and eagerly Gordon called out their names. But that one answer and question was all they could get from the hut and they suspected that he was being prevented from

speaking again. And now the natives were beginning to lose their appearance of awe and were assuming a more hostile attitude for a boomerang flew under the wings and narrowly missed Gordon's head.

"Better lift her up a bit," he grinned and Bill increased the speed of the elevator. "That's enough. They can't reach us here," he added a moment later.

The plane was now about fifty feet above the ground and, standing up, Gordon pointed first to himself and then to the hut. For several minutes he continued the pantomime and finally several of the natives seemed to be discussing the matter among themselves and soon two of them entered the hut and the hearts of the boys beat high with the hope that they were going to bring Fred out and set him free. But they emerged a moment later without him and their hearts sank.

"They get me all right," Gordon snapped, "but that's all the good it seems to be doing."

"They don't seem to be very responsive and that's a fact," Bill agreed, "but then we didn't expect it, and we've at least learned that it's he they've got."

"I hope it doesn't make it any harder for him."

"I hardly think it will. They've had him several days and if they were going to kill him I reckon they'd have done it before now."

"If I thought they were I'd—"

Gordon never finished the sentence for at that instant a wild cry came from below and they saw a boy burst from the hut closely followed by a native brandishing a boomerang in his hand. Gordon took in the situation instantly and, drawing his automatic, took careful aim and fired. So quickly had it all happened that the native had taken hardly more than a half dozen steps, and he fell with a wild shriek.

"Quick, now," Gordon shouted, and Bill started the forward propeller and headed the plane down at a sharp angle.

At the sound of the shot the boy on the ground had stopped and as it happened none of the natives were within a dozen feet of him. As for the natives they stood as though paralyzed gazing, now at the plane and again at their fallen comrade. They seemed too frightened to make a move, but as the plane touched the earth close to Fred, one of them, a big fellow standing nearest, raised his hand and in the hand was a boomerang. But before he could draw it back for the throw Gordon had fired and the club flew from his hand.

"In behind here, quick," Bill ordered and Fred lost no time in obeying the order. At the same time Bill pushed the lever over to the next to the last notch and the plane began to rise. Then the spell

which had held the natives broke as they realized that their captive was escaping and almost instantly the air seemed filled with flying boomerangs.

"Duck," Bill shouted as one of the clubs just missed his head.

Thump—bang—the clubs struck the bottom and sides of the plane. But in a minute they were out of range and lifted their heads. And it was a very lucky thing that it happened just when it did for Bill had not realized that he had gone so far beneath the overhang of the mountain. Ten feet more and the plane would have crashed into the wall and the smashing of the elevator would undoubtedly have meant death to them all. As it was there was scarcely three feet between the whirling blades and the rocks when he stopped the ascent. A moment later and they were safe out over the tops of the trees.

"Gee, but that was the closest ever," Gordon panted. "I sure thought we were goners."

"So did I," Bill confessed. "God was very good to us."

"I'll say so," Gordon breathed reverently.

They were passing over the top of the mountain at the moment and as soon as they were able they headed back for the mine. Up to this time Fred had not spoken a word but now he started in.

"Is this just a dream or is it really you?" he almost shouted.

"Pinch yourself and you'll see that you're awake," Gordon laughed turning in his seat.

"But—but what are you doing here?"

"Just now we're taking you back to your mine," Gordon told him.

"But how did you get here and why did you come?" was the next question.

"We came in the plane and we came to find you. You see, your mother is very much worried about you."

"I suppose she is," Fred said soberly. "I've been a pretty mean boy to her, but if I ever get back home, believe me, I'm going to make it up to her."

"That's the way to talk," Bill told him. "And, as things look now, you stand a pretty good show of getting back because we're going to take you with us."

"In this plane?"

"You bet."

Nothing more was said until the plane had landed by the side of the stream and they had jumped out. Then Fred grasped each by the hand and tears chased themselves down his cheeks as he tried to find words to thank them.

"I tell you you came just in the nick of time. A couple of hours later and it would have been too late," he told them.

"You mean they were going to kill you," Bill asked.

"I'm pretty certain they were," Fred replied. "Of course I couldn't understand much of their talk but I've learned a few words and I believe that's what they were trying to make me understand last night."

For an hour they talked, Fred telling them of his adventures and the boys explaining how they had found him. Then, suddenly, Fred said: "Gee, but I forgot to tell you something. They've got a white girl in their camp."

"A white girl," both boys repeated.

"Yes, and she's not more than eight or nine years old. I saw her several times and she was always crying. I didn't get a chance to speak to her and, of course, don't know who she is, but it's a girl they've stolen somehow."

"Great guns, will they kill her?" Bill demanded.

"No, I don't think so. They seemed to treat her pretty well. You see, somehow or other, there aren't but a few women in the tribe and I believe they intend to keep her and make her one of them when she gets old enough. Honestly, fellows, those na-

tives are the laziest things that ever breathed. They don't work a bit more than they can help and just enough to keep themselves from starving, and they're hardly human they're so feeble minded. It's characteristic to a large extent of all the native tribes in Australia but, take it from me, that tribe is the zero hour."

"But you haven't told us how they got hold of you," Gordon said.

"I was just coming to that when I thought of that girl. I was on my way back to a little trading post about fifty miles to the north of here when they jumped me. I was going to get some supplies as I was getting pretty low. I've made the trip twice and didn't have any trouble. But they got me this time."

"Have you found much gold?" Bill asked as he paused.

"About forty thousand dollars worth I think. I've got it all buried in a safe place. I'll show you."

"Never mind the gold now," Gordon said. "We've got something more important to think of."

"You mean—?"

"We've got to figure out some way to get that girl away from those savages."

"I thought you'd say that," Fred said proudly.

"Well, we can't very well leave her to their tender mercies."

"Not as long as we're white," Bill added.

"It's going to be anything but an easy job," Fred assured them. "Of course," he hastened to add, "I'm with you to the last ditch only we've got to be careful. I know something about those fellows and if they should get hold of one of us now—well, it would be curtains in mighty short order."

"Do you know in which of the huts they keep her?" Bill asked.

"No, I don't. You see they let her go about in the village about as she chooses but I know some one is keeping pretty close watch of her all the time."

"Do they know that you saw her?" Gordon asked.

"Why, I don't know. I don't believe they do. You see, I only saw her from that hut they kept me in. The front of it was open most of the time. They kept me tied all the time and I didn't get outside once."

"You haven't told us how you managed to get away when you did," Bill reminded him.

"No? Well, there's been so much to tell that I didn't think of that. You see, they had my feet tied together and my hands fastened behind my back

and to a post driven in the ground. They never even untied them to let me eat but one of them fed me. Well, I'd been at work for two days or more stretching and twisting when no one was there and little by little I'd got the things loose. I was afraid all the time that they'd get on to it but they're too dumb to notice a thing like that. Well, when I heard you shout, I just gave it all I had and broke loose. That's all there was to it."

"It'll help if they think you know nothing about the girl," Bill said.

"What makes you think that?" Fred asked.

"Why, if they know you've seen her they'll be expecting us to try to rescue her, won't they?"

"I doubt it," Fred told him. "Honestly, Bill, you don't realize how dumb they are. But, of course, it's possible they might reason that out, that is, if they do think I saw her. We'd better plan on that basis anyhow."

"By the way, Gordon, do you think you killed that man you shot?" Bill asked.

"No, I only got him in the leg. I didn't want to kill him if I could help it so I aimed low."

"Well, I'm glad of that. And now, I move that we go into a committee of the whole and discuss ways and means."

For some time they discussed one plan after another but each in turn was discarded as being impracticable. Finally Bill said:

"If I had an old sheet and some phosphorous and could speak their lingo I'll bet I could turn the trick."

"Yes, and if we had some ham we could have ham and eggs for dinner if we had the eggs," Gordon scoffed.

"Which reminds me that Fred here is probably half starved and it is about time for dinner. Come, boy, do your stuff."

They had hot biscuits and fried trout for dinner and Fred declared it was absolutely the best meal he had ever eaten.

"Do you think there's any danger of those natives attacking us here?" Bill asked as they were cleaning up.

"I don't think so," Fred replied. "They're too lazy to go this far away from home and I don't think they know anything about this place. I've been here most three months and I haven't see a native anywhere near here. No, I believe we're safe enough so long's we keep away from them."

"Which we can't do if we're going to get that girl away from them," Bill reminded him.

As soon as the dinner things were cleared away

they again took up the question of rescuing the girl and for a long time they talked, but, as Gordon said, got no nearer than when they started. It did indeed seem an almost hopeless undertaking, but not one of them suggested that they give it up. Fred warned them that, while the natives were dumb and lazy they were quick in their movements when there was need to be and that he believed them to be absolutely merciless when it came to fighting.

"They've got no fire arms, or at least I never saw any there, but take it from me, they don't need 'em. Those babies' can throw them boomerangs straighter than the average man can shoot a bullet and they go mighty nigh as fast it seems to me," he told them.

"But we've got to think of something," Gordon insisted. "And it seems to me we've thought of about everything."

"But not the right thing," Bill reminded him.

"There isn't any right way far's I can see," Gordon grumbled.

"But there's got to be. I'd never forgive myself if we went away and left that child to her fate."

"Of course you wouldn't and neither would Fred and I but what's the answer?"

"If we only knew for sure just where to find her

I'd say have a try at it right now. I believe two of us could keep them off with our automatics while the other picked her up," Bill mused.

"You'd never in the world do it that way," Fred shook his head. "I'll grant you it worked once but they'd get you with one of their boomerangs before you'd taken a dozen steps and, believe me, they'd get you right."

"Maybe, but seeing that we wouldn't know where to look for her that plan's out anyhow."

"And we can't go rummaging around the camp in the dark. They'll undoubtedly set a watch for awhile anyhow, and we wouldn't stand a chance of getting away with a whole skin let alone getting the girl," Gordon offered.

"Not a chance," Fred agreed.

"Well, let's stop thinking about it for awhile," Bill suggested, "and perhaps an idea will come to one of us."

As soon as the meeting was declared adjourned Fred showed them his store of nuggets which he had hidden a short distance from the shack and they agreed with him that he had fully the amount he had stated.

"But I think it's about played out," he declared. "Oh, there's more gold there but I've got the cream

of it. Of course they may be even richer lodes somewhere else in the stream. But I'm satisfied if I don't get another ounce."

Although they did not anticipate any interference on the part of the natives they decided that it would be part of wisdom to set a watch during the night. So, shortly after nine o'clock Bill was sitting alone on a stone about a dozen feet in front of the shack in which the others were sound asleep. He was glad of an opportunity to do some thinking by himself, for a plan had formed in his mind and he wished time to think it out. It was, he realized, not without a good deal of danger but it was the only way he could see which gave any promise of success.

The night was dark as heavy clouds obscured the moon and, save for the splash of water in the stream and the occasional bark of a distant dingo, it was very still. He was to call Gordon at twelve o'clock but when the hour came he did not feel sleepy and decided to let his brother rest a while longer. Again and again he went over the plan in his mind and each time it seemed more feasible. At one o'clock he called Gordon and was, of course, soundly berated for not waking him at the appointed time.

"Now you've knocked the schedule all into a cocked hat," he complained.

"Not necessarily " Bill told him. "All you've got to do is to call Fred at three and there you are."

He said nothing to Gordon regarding his new formed plan as he wished to go over it once more and make sure that it was practical. So it happened that he had not gone to sleep when, a half hour later, Gordon stood beside him and whispered his name.

"What is it?" he asked, sitting up.

"There's something or someone prowling about the place," Gordon whispered.

"Sure?"

"Dead sure or I wouldn't have disturbed you."

"I wasn't asleep anyhow," Bill declared as he got to his feet and followed Gordon from the shack without disturbing Fred.

"Where is it?" he whispered.

"Over there by that big bush, or it was the last time I heard it,"

"Keep close behind me and have your gun ready."

For a moment they listened and then as they were about to start across the clearing, when they distinctly heard a heavy grunt which undoubtedly came from the bush. Closely followed by Gordon, Bill ran toward the sound his gun in one hand and a flash light in the other. But the sound was not

repeated and, as they listened standing close to the edge of the clump, not a sound was heard.

"Stand right here and I'll step around a bit," Bill whispered and, not waiting for Gordon to object, he started to round the bush.

But he had taken only a dozen steps when suddenly he felt himself grasped by a powerful pair of arms and a huge hand was pressed tightly over his mouth and, despite his struggles, he was borne rapidly through the thick growth.

So silently had the capture been made Gordon was entirely unaware that anything had happened. He waited a few minutes and, not hearing anything from his brother, began to grow slightly alarmed.

"Bill," he called in a loud whisper but there was no reply.

He waited another minute and then called his name in a louder tone. But as before there was no reply. Now thoroughly alarmed he started around the clump calling as he went. But he made a complete circuit of the clump, flashing his light as he went, for he was rapidly growing desperate. That something had happened to Bill he was certain and he lost all thought of danger to himself. Though what could have happened in so short a time and so near at hand without a sound being made was beyond his comprehension.

"What's wrong?"

The question came from Fred who had been awakened by the cries and had hurried from the shack.

"Bill's gone," Gordon told him.

"Gone—gone where?"

"That's what I'd like to know. He was here a minute ago and now he's gone."

CHAPTER XIII.

UMBAGO AGAIN

WHEN Bill had been grabbed from behind the automatic had been jarred from his hand and he was entirely unarmed. His first thought was that a gorilla had grabbed him but second thought reminded him that there were no such animals in Australia. But he was sure that he was in the hands of a most powerful being of some kind for he was carried along at a rapid pace and he could not hear his captor breathe.

In his left hand he still held the flash light and he struggled to release the arm so that he might flash the light in his captor's face thinking that it might cause him to drop him to the ground and offer a chance of escape. The growth, which at first had been fairly scattering soon increased in denseness and even the mighty thing, which carried him as though he weighed nothing, was forced to slow up his pace. But, even so, Bill wondered at his speed and feared lest he might be crushed against the trunk of a small tree and severely injured.

They must have covered fully a mile before his

captor stopped and dropped him to the ground. Fortunately he struck a soft spot and was not even jarred. But his arm was at last free and, without stopping to think what the result might be, he snapped on the light and shown it full in the face of *Umbago*. The native jumped back as the beam struck his face and, with a grunt of fear, started back the way they had come.

"Umbago," Bill called.

A surprised grunt followed the calling of the name and Bill knew that the giant had stopped. So he called the name again and took a few steps in the direction he had gone. Another grunt and the black stood before him. Bill at once flashed the light back upon himself so that the other could get a good look at him, and the giant fell on his knees and bowed his massive head to the ground.

"It's all right, old fellow," Bill laughed as he placed his hand on the other's shoulder.

Grunt followed grunt as the native slowly got to his feet and held out both hands to Bill.

"It's all right, old boy," Bill repeated as he took both the huge hands.

Then, keeping hold of one of his hands and using the flashlight freely, he started back toward the camp. But they had gone but a few steps before the giant, as though just comprehending what was in-

tended, caught him up in his arms again and started back at a much faster pace than Bill could have possibly managed on foot.

They had covered about half the distance when Bill heard his name called and knew that Gordon was coming toward them.

"It's all right, boy," he shouted.

"Where are you?" Gordon demanded a world of relief in his voice.

"Coming," Bill called back.

A moment later he saw the light of Gordon's flash and heard him say: "Well, I'll be switched if it isn't—"

"Sure it is," Bill laughed as he slid from the giant's arm and threw himself on Gordon for a good hug.

"Thank God you're safe," Gordon cried, "But what was the big idea?"

"Haven't found that out myself yet. Case of mistaken identity I'm thinking."

"Friend of yours?" Fred, who had been close behind Gordon, asked as Bill threw his light on the giant.

"Seems that way," Bill laughed. "We'll tell you all about it when we get back to camp. Come on, Umbago."

At first the giant seemed reluctant to accompany

them but when Bill took him by the hand he offered no resistance, and a few minutes later they were back at the mine. It was nearly two o'clock and, as the moon had come out from behind the clouds, it was light enough to see clearly all about the open space. The giant grunted several times as he looked about the place and finally pointed to the shack and then took his heat about ten feet in front of it.

"He means for us to go to bed and he'll watch the ranch," Fred told them.

"Can you understand what he says?" Bill asked him.

"Not much but I get a word now and then and that's what he's driving at."

"Then I reckon we'd better do as he says. He might be peeved if we don't," Gordon suggested.

"Must be you've met him before," Fred said as they entered the shack.

In a few words Bill explained the circumstances under which they had met the giant and asked him if he had ever seen him before.

"No, I've never seen him but I've heard of him," Fred told them. "In fact he's quite a famous character here. Doesn't belong to any tribe and won't have anything to do with any of the natives. He's supposed to be very fierce."

"Then he must have taken a strange fancy to us," Gordon chuckled.

It was broad daylight when they awoke and the giant was sitting in the same place, but he got up with a friendly grunt as Bill came from the shack. I guess he means that for good morning, he thought as he held out his hand.

They still had a half dozen packages of the pancake flour and an hour later were feeding their native friend with large helpings of flap-jacks made in Bill's best style. That he fully enjoyed the meal was evidenced by his grunts of delight every time Gordon placed a fresh batch in front of him.

"He says they are very good," Fred told them after listening to a series of grunts.

"Thanks, glad he likes them," Bill laughed.

"Too bad we haven't a few barrels of the flour," Gordon added.

The packages of flour were large ones but they used up three of them before the guest signified that he had had enough. Then they used about half of one of those left for themselves. The giant watched them as they ate and finally gave vent to a series of grunts which Fred interpreted as contempt for their small capacity.

"Although he may be saying that there's enough left for another meal for him," he laughed.

"Now, Fred," Bill began after the meal was finished. "I want you to see if you can get Umbago to understand that there's a girl with that tribe and that we want to get her. Maybe he can help us."

Fred shook his head in doubt but started in at the job and for half an hour he strove to make the giant understand what he was driving at, and it was evident to the boys that he was trying his best to grasp the situation. Finally he gave vent to a more or less satisfied grunt and, after shaking hands with all three, he disappeared going up the stream.

"I think he got it but I'm not sure," Fred declared as he vanished in the bushes. "I think he's gone to see what he can do about it and, unless I miss my guess, he'll bring her back with him."

"Then all we can do is to stay here and wait till he gets back?" Gordon asked.

"I think that's what we'd better do," Fred told him. "He evidently doesn't want any help."

"Then I'm going to try my hand at mining while we're waiting," Gordon told them as he began pulling off his shoes. "Where's the best place?"

"Right out there near the middle," Fred told him, pointing to a place a little above the camp.

"That's where I found those nuggets the other time I tried it. Here goes."

He worked steadily for a couple of hours and was,

as Bill put it, very high hat over the result, nearly an ounce of very pure gold.

"Not bad for a green-horn, eh?" he grinned as he threw himself down on the ground beside the others.

"No, but as I told you I think I've got the most of it," Fred told him.

"But that's a pretty good two hours work if you ask me," Gordon retorted.

The time passed slowly, especially to Gordon who hated inactivity and had nothing to read, having forgotten to put any books in the plane.

"Isn't it about time the boy friend was getting back?" he asked as they were getting supper.

"No knowing when he'll come or if he'll come at all," Bill told him. "I'm not building too much on him. You know how unreliable these natives are, that is if they're like most natives."

"They are only ten times worse," Fred told him.

"But he seems different," Gordon insisted. "I'd bet a lot on him."

"Well, I hope you won't be disappointed," Bill grinned. "I sure do hate to think of all those flap-jacks wasted."

"Then you were only casting bread upon the waters when you fed him?" Gordon jeered.

"Well, we sure did cast a lot of it anyway you look

at it," Fred laughed. "But I'm betting with Gordon. He'll be back and bring the girl with him if he can."

Darkness settled down over the camp and still the black had not returned. Finally when eleven o'clock came and he was still absent they decided to go to bed, Bill, as on the previous night, taking the first watch.

"I believe we're wasting our time," he grumbled, "and if he doesn't show up by morning, I'm going to try my plan."

"Didn't know you had one," Gordon told him.

"Well, I've got a sort of one but I'm not sure it's any good."

"Well, spill it and we'll see if it is."

"No, I'm going to wait till morning and see if he comes back."

"Aw, don't be so tight."

"If he isn't here by seven o'clock in the morning I'll give you my plan."

When Bill spoke in that tone Gordon knew it was no use to argue so, followed by Fred, he entered the shack and in five minutes was sound asleep. Bill called him a few minutes after two and reported everything quiet and the black still absent.

"Either they're got him or he's gone back on us," Gordon whispered as he got to his feet.

"That's what I think," Bill agreed.

"But I really didn't think it of him and I'm still betting that he's playing it straight. Of course if they've captured him that's not his fault."

"No, only his misfortune," Bill said as he rolled himself up in the blanket. "Call me if you hear anything suspicious."

But nothing happened except that the time passed more slowly than Gordon had ever known it to be before. Finally, however, five o'clock came and, in accordance with the arrangement, he called Fred. The sun was an hour high but Gordon was sleepy and turned in for a nap leaving Fred to take charge.

He called the others at seven o'clock and reported that he had heard nothing suspicious but that the black had not returned.

"Now, then, for the big plan," Gordon said as he rolled from his blanket.

"Better have breakfast first. I see Fred has the fire going," Bill smiled.

"You know you can win that way," Gordon grumbled. "Alright, but not a minute later."

"I promise," Bill laughed.

Breakfast was a hurried meal as both Gordon and Fred were anxious to hear Bill's plan. So, shortly after half past seven, he began.

"You remember what I said the other day about scaring them with a sheet and some phosphorus.

Well, that's my plan and it's the only one that I know of that has a chance."

"But where are we going to get the stuff?" Gordon demanded.

"Go after it, of course. You don't expect it will come to us, do you?"

"Well, hardly. But where are we going?"

"We're not going. I'm going."

"Oh. Well, where are you going? And what's the matter with us all going?"

"I'll answer the last question first. Because that fellow may come back with the girl for one thing. And the answer to the other is Burketown. That's up north of here and not more than six or seven hundred miles."

"But they don't have phosphorous in every small town," Fred objected.

"I know it and, of course, I may not be able to get it there, and if so I'll have to go somewhere else, but it's a pretty good sized town and it's more than an even bet that they'll have some. But don't worry if I'm not back for a couple of days. Of course if I get it alright I ought to be back by seven or eight o'clock tonight."

"You going to start right away?" Gordon asked.

"Within ten minutes," Bill told him. "You see,

I want to get back before dark if I can and besides there's nothing to wait for."

Well, I don't altogether like it but, as you say, it seems the only chance. But do be careful: remember we're a long way from home when it comes to footing it," Gordon warned him.

There was little to do in the way of preparation and in a very few minutes Bill was shaking hands with them and promising to get back at the earliest possible minute.

"Better bring back a good supply of flap-jack flour," Gordon said as the motor started.

"I'll do that if I can get it," Bill promised as the plane rose from the ground.

They watched the plane until it was out of sight over the tops of the mountains and then Gordon turned to Fred with a slow shake of his head. "Somehow or other I don't like it," he said.

"Oh, he'll get back alright," Fred tried to cheer him up by pretending an optimism he was far from feeling.

"Well, I'm going fishing to pass away the time. What are you going to do?"

"Think I'll pan a little gold if I can strike a decent place, and don't you get too far away."

"Just down by that deep hole, it's only a hundred feet or so from here."

Bill drove the plane at nearly full speed and reached the town of Burketown shortly after one o'clock, having made seven hundred and fifty miles in a little less than five hours. There were two drug stores in the town and the first one had no phosphorus, but the proprietor told him that he thought that he could get some at the other store six blocks down the street.

"That fellow's considerable of a chemist and is always doing a lot of experimenting and it'll be strange if he hasn't got some."

To his great joy the chemist did have a good supply of the non-metal on hand and readily consented to sell him three sticks each about two inches long after he had explained what he wanted them for.

"And I'll get you some old sheets if you'll wait a minute and it'll save you some time. No, I don't want a cent for them, they're old ones and no good to me. And I sure hope you win out," he added as Bill turned to leave.

There was a grocery store close by and he hurriedly purchased a dozen packages of flour for flap-jacks and a few other things they needed and the grocerman agreed to have his man drive him out with the things to the outskirts of the town where he had left the plane.

By half past two he was again in the air and headed south. He was in a great hurry to get back, and as soon as possible, opened up the motor to nearly its limit. They never used the last bit of power unless absolutely necessary for fear of damaging the brushes through over-heating. A hundred and fifty miles an hour was soon reached and he maintained that speed until the range of mountains came into view and a few minutes later he was circling over the site of the mine.

As he settled toward the earth and glanced down over the side of the cockpit he was slightly alarmed at seeing no sign of life about the place. It was only half past seven and still light enough for clear vision. But he supposed they were somewhere about the shack and brought the plane to the ground and jumped out with a shout of inquiry. But there was no answer and a vague fear gripped his heart. A moment later and this fear increased almost to the point of panic for there was abundant evidence that something very serious had taken place. The first thing he noticed was Gordon's fly rod lying on the ground, and closer inspection revealed many prints in naked feet in the softer spots in the clearing. Finally he picked up a boomerang on the farther edge of the clearing where it had been partially concealed by the overhanging branches of a large

bush. Yes, there was no doubt but that the place had been invaded by natives and the two boys carried off, and deep despair filled his heart as he thought of what their fate might be.

CHAPTER XIV.

GORDON AND FRED IN TROUBLE

GORDON had reached the pool, just below the clearing, and was about to make his first cast when, without the slightest warning, he was seized from behind and hurled to the ground. Instinctively he reached for his automatic which was in the back pocket of his trousers, but before he could get to it his hand was grasped and he was jerked to his feet while his arms were, with the same movement, pinned to his side. Three powerful built savages grinned in his face while a fourth bound his hands behind his back.

Gordon realized that to offer any resistance would but invite harsher treatment so he accepted the situation as calmly as possible and offered no objection as his captors made signs for him to proceed with them toward the clearing. Arriving there he found, as he expected, that Fred had been captured and the boy sat on the ground in front of the shack with his hands bound behind his back and a look of utter hopelessness on his face. Seven or eight more of the

blacks were gathered about him grinning their joy and making weird gestures. Gordon noticed that one of his captors had brought his fly rod along and for a moment it attracted the attention of the entire band. But soon it was thrown to the ground and the boys were made to understand that they were leaving at once.

"No use to make any resistance just now," Gordon told Fred as they started off up stream. Three of the blacks led the way, the boys followed and the rest of the band brought up the rear.

"I never heard a thing till they grabbed me," Fred said in a low voice as they trudged along.

"Neither did I," Gordon returned. "These fellows may be lazy and all that but, take it from me, they know their stuff when it comes to springing a surprise."

"We mustn't let them get us to the village if we can help it. Once they get us there it will be next to impossible to get away."

"Well, it doesn't look any too hopeful even now."

"I know, but we must watch every minute for a chance."

The natives seemed to be in no hurry and frequently stopped to rest although the boys could see that they were not in the least winded. But it was more and more evident that Fred's estimate of their

laziness was not exaggerated for they seemed to enjoy nothing so much as throwing themselves on the ground and lying at full length gazing up at the sky. But, in spite of their indolence, Gordon could see that they were being very closely watched.

Gordon had small hands and thick wrists and it had for a long time been one of his boasts that he could not be bound so that he could not get free given enough time. Instinctively he had braced the cords of his wrists while the native was binding them with the result that when he relaxed there was a bit of looseness which he knew he could augment in a short time. This he had been doing as they went along and by the time a couple of hours had passed he knew that he could free himself any time he wished.

Gordon had told Fred soon after starting out that he was sure that he could free himself in time and now he assured him that it was as good as accomplished.

"That's fine, wish I could do as much but I can't. My wrists are tied so tight that my hands are numb," Fred groaned.

The blacks had made no objection to the boys talking together and had made no attempt to keep them apart. It was evident that they were very sure that there could be no chance of escape and as they

went along Gordon fancied that they were being watched less closely.

About noon they reached the open plateau and there was a long stop while the blacks ate what seemed to be a sort of black bread which each man carried in a small bag made of skin suspended from his neck by a short cord. None of the food was offered to the boys and they gave no sign that they desired any, although Gordon confided to Fred that he was getting pretty hungry.

"I think the best time to stage a get-a-way will be after we get into the woods just this side of the village," Fred declared shortly before they started to cross the plateau.

"That's what I've been thinking," Gordon agreed. "Not much chance out here in the open."

"It's a good thing they haven't taken our guns away from us."

"You said it, and I've got my knife in my pocket and the first thing I'll do will be to cut your wrists free and I'll try to do it before we make the break. It'll be just that much time gained."

The thing that Gordon feared most was that one of the natives might take a notion to examine his bonds and learn that he was practically free so far as his wrists were concerned. But apparently it never occurred to any of them to do so and soon

after one o'clock they started again. Fred complained of the numbness in his hands and Gordon knew that he was suffering but, of course, there was nothing he could do to relieve him. As they advanced the natives became more and more inclined to stop and it was late in the afternoon when they finally reached the edge of the forest which separated the plateau from the village.

Here they paused for a longer rest than usual and the boys had an opportunity to converse at length.

"We must make the break at the first stop after we get into the woods," Gordon said.

"But suppose they make no stop," Fred suggested.

"Oh, I reckon they will, but if we find they're not going to we'll have to make it anyhow."

"Yes, we'll have to make it. It won't do to let them get us to the village and I don't mean maybe."

"Listen now, when we stop again I'm going to lie down right behind you and we want to plan it so that you'll be between me and them. Then I'll free my wrists and get my knife out and cut your bonds. Then we'll wait till the numbness gets a bit out of your hands."

"Seems to me it'll be best to make the break while we're on the move."

"Can't be done. You see some of them'll be close behind us and can't help seeing that our wrists are no longer tied. No, we'll have to do it before we start, and we must be careful not to get separated. Keep close behind me and we mustn't fire the guns unless we have to. We'll be too near the village and we don't want the whole pack after us."

"But we mustn't be captured again. They'll make it hard for us if they catch us again," Fred warned him.

"Oh, we'll have to shoot if it's the only way of course," Gordon told him, "but I don't want to kill any of them if we can help it, but if it's them or us I'd a heap rather it'd be them."

It was nearly six o'clock when they entered the narrow path which led through the dense forest and, although it was still bright sunlight out in the open, here it was decidedly dusky, an event which brought much joy to the hearts of the two captives.

"It'll be pretty dark in here before long," Fred whispered as they rounded a sharp turn in the path soon after entering the woods.

"All the better for us," Gordon replied.

But it was soon evident that the savages were now in more of a hurry, for those in the lead hit up a faster pace and the boys began to think that they would go straight through without making a

stop. But to their great relief they found they were mistaken for, when they were about half way through, as nearly as the boys could judge, the leaders threw themselves on the ground with deep grunts of fatigue.

At this point in the path it widened out and on both sides the forest was not quite so dense as it had been and they noted that there was but little undergrowth for some distance back. Fred had thrown himself down close by the side of the path and Gordon stretched out right behind him in such a way that his body was to some extent shielded from the view of the natives. He lost no time in getting into action for he believed the rest would be a short one, and in almost no time had released his hands. Then, making as little movement as possible, he got out his knife and in another instant Fred's hands also were free.

"Say when you get some feeling in your hands, we'll take this side of the trail," he whispered.

"They're mighty numb and I don't dare get them round front to rub them, so I think we'd better wait till they make a move to go," Fred said.

"That'll be the signal then. Let's hope they wait long enough so you can handle your gun."

But in this they were disappointed for in less than five minutes one of the natives made a move toward

getting to his feet. Instantly the boys leaped up, and before the astonished natives knew what had happened, they had disappeared from sight. Gordon was in the lead and for about fifty feet he ran straight ahead, then turning sharp to the left, he ran parallel to the trail they had been following. But the freedom from undergrowth did not last and before they had gone a hundred feet they were having difficulty in pushing through, and only a few yards behind they could hear the excited cries of the pursuing natives.

"They're going to catch us in no time," Fred panted close on Gordon's heels.

"Looks like it. Can you use your gun?"

"I guess so."

By this time Gordon had his gun in his hand and turning he fired a shot aiming so that the bullet would pass over their heads as he did not want to hit one of them unless it became necessary. Following the report a startled cry of anger rang through the woods and they knew that the leading natives had stopped.

"Better give 'em another just to let 'em know it wasn't a mistake," Fred suggested, and Gordon took the advice.

The boys had stopped to see what would be the effect of the shots and now they could hear an ex-

cited jabbering although they were unable to see any of their pursuers, so dense was the forest.

"Better push on," Fred advised.

"I think it's going to hold them," Gordon declared as he started again.

"You never can tell. They know what guns are and I reckon they have a pretty wholesome respect for them, but they want us pretty badly."

"And they're going to have one sweet time getting hold of us again."

Not many minutes passed before it was evident that the desire of the savages to recapture them had overcome their fear for they could hear them coming on again. However, the boys had gained a short lead and hoped that they would be able to maintain it. But through that dense growth the natives were able to make at least two feet to their one and before long they were only a few yards behind.

"Guess we'll have to teach 'em a lesson," Fred panted as Gordon stopped behind the trunk of a very large tree.

"I know it," he replied grimly. "Let me do it and I'll not kill him, just prick him in the leg."

They had but a minute to wait before they could see the leading native plunging at what seemed to them a rapid rate through the vines. Gordon waited until he was only about twenty feet distant, then

watching his chance, fired aiming at his leg above the knee. He was a splendid shot with the automatic and the bullet sped straight to its mark and the man went down with a bellow of pain.

"Maybe that'll hold 'em," Gordon snapped as the second native came into view.

He stopped by the side of his wounded comrade and a moment later after a short conversation, picked him up and retreated.

"I thought so," Gordon grinned.

"I reckon that'll be about all from them," Fred agreed.

For several minutes they waited and listened but there was no further sound of pursuit and, feeling that for the time being at least the danger was over, they started off again heading to the left so as to strike the trail again. They reached it a few minutes later only to hear the sound of pattering feet coming toward them. Instinctively they shrank back behind a thick clump of bushes and none too soon, for past them raced a large crowd of natives.

"Gee whiz, the whole pack's after us," Gordon whispered as the last runner disappeared. "Do you suppose they heard the shots? It's been too soon for any of those others to reach the village and give the alarm."

"I imagine it was the shots they heard, but per-

haps they're not after us after all. Maybe something else is up."

"Well, whether they're after us or not we don't want them to get a chance to gather us in so I reckon we'd better stick to the unbeaten path."

"Yep, there's altogether too much traffic on this road to suit us."

"Wonder if Bill's back," Gordon mused as they pushed their way back into the woods. "He'll be worried about crazy if he is."

"He'd hardly be back this soon. It isn't seven o'clock yet."

"I wish I knew where those guys are bound for and why," Gordon said, as he stopped a moment to get his wind. "I hate like the dickins to have Bill get back and find us gone. He'll know what's happened and goodness knows what he'll do about it. It'll be just like him to start right out on our trail and if he does he'll get into trouble sure as guns."

"Well, it'll be dark in about an hour and I guess we can get back then without them catching us," Fred suggested.

"Well, we'll make our way out to the edge of the woods and see how the land lies," Gordon said as they started on again.

It was now almost dark in the dense forest and they had hard work to make any headway at all so

thick were the vines and bushes which grew between the trees, and every little while they had to stop and rest for a few minutes. Then they would push on again anxious to make as good time as possible.

"Sure we're going the right way?" Fred asked after they had been on the way for some time.

"Why, yes, I think so, don't you?" Gordon replied a bit worried.

"Well, it seems to me we've been going in the right direction but don't you think we ought to be about out?"

"I was just thinking that myself. Seems to me we've gone far enough to be there. Hope we aren't lost."

A consummation devoutly to be desired.

"I'm not as good as Bill is in keeping the right direction in the woods. You can't lose him."

"Well, I don't believe you can lose you either. Come on, we're probably all right only we've been making such slow headway that it seems longer than it ought to be."

But when another half hour passed and they had not emerged they were forced to agree that they were lost. That in itself did not cause them any alarm for Gordon knew that as soon as the sun rose in the morning he could easily find his way. Neither did the prospect of having to spend the

night in the woods worry them. That in itself would be a matter of little moment to either of them. No, it was the thought of Bill returning to the mine and finding them gone that gave them concern.

It was now almost entirely dark and the night bid fair to be cloudy, not that that mattered much for, as Gordon told Fred, they would not be able to see enough stars to get any idea of direction from them.

"I sure do hope he doesn't get back till tomorrow," Gordon said, as they sat down to rest and decide what to do.

"Probably he won't," Fred consoled him.

"Don't you believe it. I'll bet my last year's hat that he's back now and wondering where we are. Or more likely he's hitting the trail right now and like as not'll run into that band."

"Well, what is to be will be, I suppose. In the meantime what had we better do, call it a day or keep on trying to find our way out?"

"If we haven't been going right, and it's evident that we haven't, I haven't the least idea of which way to go. If we could see the stars we'd be all right. Just let me know which way is north and I'd have you out of here in no time. But which way is north? That's the question."

"Well, I don't pretend to be much of a woods-

man but I'd say right over there," Fred declared pointing to his right."

"Then we ought to go in that direction," Gordon declared, pointing nearly at right angles to the way Fred had indicated.

"All right, suppose we try it for awhile. We can't get any more lost than we are right now and we may get out."

"I'm game, come on."

So for another half hour they squeezed and pushed their way along making, as Gordon declared, about as much headway as a snail going to a funeral. But they did not come to the edge of the woods and at last Gordon threw himself panting on the ground declaring that he was about all in, and it was evident to him that Fred was in an even worse condition.

"We aren't getting anywhere and we might's well not kill ourselves," he told Fred who was wiping the sweat from his face.

"I'm ready to call it a day, believe me," he panted.

CHAPTER XV.

BILL WONDERS

As Bill stood there in front of the shack wondering what to do, a feeling of despair stole over him. With night coming on and his brother and friend in the hands of natives who already had reason to be hostile to them the situation seemed indeed almost hopeless. But he was not one to remain long in the depths and soon he was thinking desperately what he should do. That he was going to do something and that very soon he was certain but for the life of him he was unable to decide what was best. Should he set out on foot and follow the trail to the native village or should he go in the plane?

It would be dark in less than an hour and to attempt to handle the plane in that space overhung by the rocky wall of the mountain would, he realized, be little short of foolhardy. And then what could he do even if he succeeded in getting there safely? And on the other hand, it would be dark long before he could reach the place on foot and there was little

doubt but that they would be on the watch knowing that, although they had two of their enemies there was still one left. And yet he must do something. To leave them to their fate was unthinkable. But what was it to be? Over and over he turned the situation in his mind trying to decide which course gave the most promise of success. Then, for a moment, he sank to his knees on the sand and asked that God would decide for him.

Then, as if in answer to his prayer, he heard a sound off in the distance which brought him to his feet. It was the sound of many men running and he knew that they were approaching rapidly and would be there in a very few minutes.

"Guess they're after me," he said half aloud as he climbed over the side of the cockpit and took his seat at the wheel. "Well, they'll have a sweet time catching me unless they've got wings," he muttered as he turned on the power.

Just as the *Albatross* rose in the air the band of more than thirty natives burst into the clearing and stopped short as they caught sight of the plane. Then a roar of anger burst from their lips as they saw that he was going to escape them and a perfect hail of boomerangs flew through the air and a number of them struck against the side of the plane. But

they did no harm and in a moment Bill was beyond their reach.

"Now I wonder," he muttered as he started the forward propeller.

As he circled over their heads some two hundred feet in the air he was sorely tempted to empty his automatic at them but could not quite bring himself to do it. He thought it possible that they might have Gordon and Fred with them and so he circled the clearing two or three times until he was convinced that the boys were not there. As for the natives they seemed undecided what to do next. Undoubtedly they had expected to capture him with little trouble and carry him back in triumph to the village, but at present there seemed no way by which they could get at him.

Finally, having apparently made up their minds that it was no use to wait any longer, they started back and Bill, bringing the plane down until it was only a short distance over their heads, flew along keeping pace with them. Just what he was going to accomplish by following them he was unable to say but it seemed the only thing to do. And soon he could see that his presence so close to them was getting on their nerves. Nearly every one of them kept their eyes fixed on the plane and he could see that they were increasing their speed until before

long they were running as fast as they could go.

By the time they reached the plateau it was so dark that he could hardly see the natives but he could hear them as they grunted and panted and he brought the plane down a little lower and turned on the lights. As he did this he heard a number of them give a vent to cries of surprise or fear. He was not sure which emotion predominated but he knew they were impressed. And now they made even better speed across the open space and he marveled at their power of endurance.

"They may be lazy as Fred said," he told himself, "but they sure can go to it when they want to."

After what seemed a long time, his powerful lights picked up the forest which separated the native village from the plateau and he realized that the time had come for him to make a decision as to what course he was going to take. Should he follow them to the village or should he turn back or land and wait till morning. The first seemed foolish in the extreme and he was loath to take the second course so he decided that, for the present at least, he would land near the edge of the forest.

So he turned in a short circle and started back switching off his lights soon after making the turn. Then, after going a short distance in that direction, he again turned and came back, finally bringing the

plane to the land about a hundred feet from the edge of the woods. It was very dark now as heavy clouds covered the sky and he thought that the nights must be cloudy most of the time there. For a long time he sat in the plane and listened but no sound came to him save the usual ones of the night.

Somehow the thought that he was nearer Fred and Gordon than when back at the mine made him feel a bit better although he was as far as ever from a plan which promised any degree of success. Then, almost before he realized what he was doing, he imitated the hoot of the night owl. Three times he gave the call, then waited while he counted ten and repeated. To his great surprise, from the wood directly in front of him, came an answer to the signal and a moment later the three boys were reunited.

"And to think we were close to the edge of the woods all the time and never knew it," Gordon said, as soon as the first greetings were over. "But, oh boy, I never heard anything sound so sweet as that hoot of yours."

"And it was more chance than anything else that I tried it," Bill told them. "I didn't have an idea but that you were prisoners in the village. Now tell me all that's happened."

"We'd better get back first," Fred declared.

"We're too near those natives for me if you don't mind."

"And I second the motion," Gordon broke in. "But tell me one thing. Did you get the stuff?"

"If I hadn't I wouldn't have been back so soon," Bill told him as they climbed into the plane.

It was but a short time before the plane once more landed in front of the shack and probably three happier boys never lived than the three that jumped to the ground.

"Eats first and then we'll tell stories," Gordon said as he began building a fire.

Supper was quickly prepared and quickly eaten for, although they were all hungry, they were eager to hear what had happened and Gordon positively refused to talk or let the others talk until after the meal. But then the stories were soon told and they began to lay their plans for action. It was quickly decided that the attempt should be made that very night, all fearing that they might be too late if they waited another day.

Fred had a good supply of candles and with them they made the shack light enough so that they could see to work. Bill had brought three sheets but they quickly decided that two would be enough as they deemed it wise for one of them to remain with the plane on the edge of the woods.

"Now you let me handle that phosphorus," Bill said after they had prepared the two sheets. "It's mighty dangerous stuff to handle as it's apt to catch fire right in your fingers and if it does it makes a mighty nasty burn."

He got a bucket of water from the stream and by keeping his hands and the phosphorus both wet he kept it from taking fire while he covered the sheets with many fantastic designs.

"There, I reckon that'll make 'em sit up and take notice," he declared as he donned one of the sheets and stepped outside where it was dark.

"That would scare a white man to death let alone a native," Fred assured him.

While working they had settled the question as to who was to remain and guard the plane and Gordon was the victim.

"Fred couldn't handle the plane in the first place," Bill explained when Gordon objected. "And in the second he's got to go because he's the only one who can speak a word of their lingo and we've got to make them understand what we want."

"How about you staying?" Gordon demanded.

"I'm older than you and it's only right that I should take the risk," Bill told him and from his tone Gordon knew it would be useless to argue any more.

It was after ten o'clock when they were ready to start. The sky, for a wonder, was now nearly cloudless and the moon, which was almost full, made it almost as light as day. They were not quite certain whether or not this was conducive to the best results, but it would, at any rate, make it easier for them to make their way through the forest. Fortunately Fred knew the native word for girl and enough others, he thought, to make them understand what they were after.

"How about the cells in the motors?" Gordon asked after the phosphorus bedecked sheets were stowed away in the back compartment.

"They've only gone about a thousand miles," Bill told him, "but perhaps we'd better put in new ones. It may be that we'll have to make a quick get-a-way and we don't want anything going wrong with the old bird."

"You said a lot then," Gordon assured him. "There are plenty of things to go cris-cross tonight which we may not be able to control and we'd better make sure of those that we can."

"I'd sure like to know what has happened to Umbago," Fred said as he leaned against the plane while Bill was changing the cells. "Somehow or other I've a feeling that all's not well with him."

"You mean you think they got him?" Gordon asked.

"I don't see what else could have happened to him."

"Not unless he thought better of his resolve to bring the girl to us and deserted," Bill added.

"Well, if everything goes the way we hope it will we'll find out if they've got him and if they have we'll get him back," Fred declared.

"All set?" Bill asked as he snapped the cover of the elevator back into place.

"I reckon," Gordon answered.

"Then we'll just have a word of prayer before we start."

The three boys knelt on the sand and each breathed a fervent prayer that God would be with them in their attempt to rescue the girl. And, as is always the case when prayer is sincere, all of them felt stronger and more courageous for what lay before them as they climbed into the plane.

"Let her go," Gordon cried and Bill turned the switch and the blades of the elevator began to spin.

They had reached the nearer edge of the plateau flying only a hundred feet above the trees when Gordon called Bill's attention to something on the ground below.

"That's a man unless I'm mistaken," he declared.

Bill swung the plane around in a circle at the same time slowing the motor and allowing it to sink toward the earth. As they came again over the moving object they saw that Gordon had been right. It was indeed a man and he was stumbling along as though each step would be his last.

"It's Umbago," Fred cried as the plane passed over him.

"I believe you're right," Gordon agreed, and called the native's name.

The man looked up and as he saw the plane threw up his hands and sank to the earth. A moment later the plane settled down a few feet away from him and the boys were bending over him. It was the giant or, as Gordon said, what was left of him. For it was at once evident that he had taken a terrible beating. His body was literally covered with welts and in many places the skin had been broken and the blood oozing through had dried. And on the back of his head was a lump the size of a hen's egg. He was too nearly exhausted to do more than moan faintly and the boys knew that he needed immediate attention if he was to live.

"We must get him back to the shack," Bill declared after he had finished his brief examination. "I'm afraid his skull is fractured."

"Suppose the plane'll take us all?" Gordon asked.

"Afraid not but it must take him. Catch hold."

It was all the three boys could do to lift the giant into the rear seat but it was finally accomplished and the boys took their places, Fred in the rear with Umbago. But the load was too much for the plane and, although Bill turned the full power of the cell into the elevator motor, it refused to rise.

"I'll get out and if you can get into the air without me I'll catch on as you go by. I've done it before you know," Gordon said as he leaped to the ground.

Thus lightened the plane rose slowly in the air and Bill at once started the forward motor and circled around coming back at a rate of only a few miles an hour and almost touching the ground. As he passed close to Gordon he ducked under the wing and rising quickly caught the side of the cock-pit and swung himself aboard. His added weight brought the plane down so that the wheels touched the ground but Bill had turned on the power and, although it bumped dangerously on the uneven ground, it made the grade and slowly rose just escaping the tops of three trees.

"Close one," Bill panted with a deep sigh of relief.

"I'll say," Gordon agreed. "But we made it."

A few minutes after and they were back at the shack and, as tenderly as possibly, they lifted the native from the plane and laid him on the grass beneath the roof. He was conscious but so weak that they could hardly hear his moans. They had a well filled first aid kit and for a half hour they worked bathing his lacerations and anointing them with soothing ointment. Three stiff doses of aromatic spirits of ammonia at ten minute intervals did much to revive him and they could see that strength was flowing back into his powerful frame at an encouraging rate.

"I believe he'll pull through all right," Bill declared as he more carefully examined the lump on his head which had been considerably reduced by applications of cold water. "I don't believe it's fractured after all."

"He must have been hit with a pile driver if it is," Fred said.

"More likely it was a boomerang," Bill said. "I imagine it was that blow that got him into their hands. But I'd like to know how he got away from them."

"Too bad he can't tell us," Fred added.

The giant was looking at them and if ever gratitude shone in human eyes his were filled with it. His

lips moved and it was evident that he was trying to tell them something but not even Fred could catch the words.

"Ask him if he saw the girl?" Bill suggested, and Fred repeated the word several times. At first he did not seem to understand but, at the third trial, a look of comprehension came into his eyes and he nodded his head as vigorously as his weakness would permit.

"What's he saying now?" Gordon asked a moment later as the man repeated a word several times at the same time waving his great hands in the air.

"I'm not certain," Fred told them, "but I think he's trying to tell us to hurry."

"Hurry where?"

Fred bent over the man and said two or three words at which he seemed to get much excited and nodded and shook his head at the same time waving his hands more vigorously.

"I believe he means that if we're going to save that girl we've got to hurry," Fred told them as he turned from the patient.

"We'll have to leave him here," Bill suggested.

"I think that's what he wants," Fred said.

"See if you can make him understand that we're going after her and will be back as soon as possible."

For a moment Fred spoke to the man both by words and gestures and then announced that he believed he understood and approved.

"I suppose he'll be all right here," Bill said slowly, "but I sure hate to leave him."

"There's no other way and the sooner we get started the sooner we'll get back," Gordon told him.

"God willing," Bill breathed as he turned toward the plane.

This time the trip to the edge of the woods was without incident and shortly before midnight Bill brought the plane down to the ground a bit to the left of the trail which led through the forest to the village. The moon was still shining brightly in the sky and it was so light that they could see for a considerable distance and they knew that they could make good speed on the narrow path. It took but a short time to get the sheets out and a moment later Bill and Fred had donned them and were, as Gordon declared, frightful enough to scare the day-lights out of a white man let alone a superstitious native.

"If they don't all fall down dead when they see you I'll have a better regard for them than I've ever had before," he added.

"Here's hoping," Bill told him.

"Just one thing," Gordon said as they were about to start, "Suppose——"

"Don't say it," Bill interrupted.

Then they shook hands and in another minute Bill and Fred had disappeared leaving Gordon alone.

"Oh, God, send them back safe," he breathed as he climbed over the side of the cockpit.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DARING RESCUE

As BILL and Fred entered the forest on their way to the native village, it must be confessed that their hearts beat faster than usual and that they were not at all easy in their minds as to the outcome of the adventure. Both realized that the result would depend much more on the impression which their costumes would make on the natives than on anything they might do. Would they be sufficiently frightened to permit them to secure the girl and depart unmolested, or would they attack them? That was the question which filled their minds as they hurried along, although neither voiced his fears to the other.

Although less light than outside the dense forest, the moonlight filtered through the trees sufficiently to enable them to proceed at a fast walk, and they did not pause until they had covered approximately half the distance. Then Bill, who was in the lead, stopped suddenly and held up his hand.

"Listen," he ordered. "Hear it?"

"And it means that something is about to be pulled off, unless I miss my guess."

"Then we'd better hurry."

"Well, we've been going about as fast as we can in these rigs."

"We're not far away anyhow by the sound," Fred declared as they started off again.

As they proceeded the sound of the chanting grew more and more distinct and Bill was struck by the fact that it was entirely different from what they had heard that night on the mountain. It somehow had a more cheerful sound, and he shuddered as he thought of what it might portend.

They were now beneath the overhang of the mountain, and a moment later had reached the rocky wall along which the trail led to the village, not more than a hundred rods distant.

"They're probably all together, and that'll give us a good chance to get up near them before we're seen," he told Fred as they paused for a moment. "How do I look?"

"Like the devil," Fred chuckled.

"If I look as much like him as you do, I reckon we'll make a hit all right," Bill declared as he started toward the village.

As they neared the collection of huts it was evi-

dent that the natives were gathered at the farther side, and from the sound it was evident that some great event was taking place, or was about to. The chanting had ceased, but wild cries and the beating of the drums had taken its place.

"Watch your step now," Bill whispered as they reached the first of the huts. "We want to get right on them without being seen, if we can. The more spectacular we can make our debut, the better will be our chances of success."

"Righto," Fred agreed. "I guess they'll all be there, and all we've got to do is to keep the huts between us and them. Not much danger of them hearing us with all that noise going on."

A great flare of torches could be seen and, from the manner in which the light flickered about, the boys judged that the bearers were dancing around in a circle. They dodged from hut to hut, moving as rapidly as possible, until finally they were crouching behind the last shelter between them and the open space occupied by the entire population of the village.

"Wonder how we can get a line on what's going on," Bill whispered.

"If it wasn't for this rig we could climb up on the hut, but I don't dare risk it," Fred whispered back.

"No, that wouldn't be safe. Listen."

The sounds had suddenly stopped and, for a moment, there was complete silence. Then the deep guttural tones of a man's voice came to them, seemingly from near the center of the mass of natives. Slowly he spoke as though what he was saying was of the greatest importance, and Fred tried his best to catch a word which would give him an idea as to the purport of the speech. But he could make out nothing, and he whispered to Bill:

"I can't get it, but it sounds serious."

"Think we'd better make the dash?"

"I think so."

"Come on then, do your stuff."

Then from behind the hut stalked two figures which were indeed frightful to behold. Holding their arms above their heads, the weird figures, which glistened in the moonlight on their sheeted bodies, made them look like beings from another world. But so intent were the natives on what they were doing that the ghostly objects were almost upon them before their presence was noticed. Then, as one native turned and saw them, he gave vent to a wild cry of fear, and, at the sound, many turned their heads and then fell back with a shrill cry of terror. Straight through the lane, made by the natives giving way, majestically stalked the two

ghostly figures, and no sound came from their lips, while their eyes, shining through the holes in the sheets, looked straight ahead as though the natives were beneath their notice. Then they reached the inner circle of the mob, and both caught their breaths at what they saw.

The crowd of natives were grouped around an open space about thirty feet in diameter, and in the center was a stone pile and on the pile a large quantity of dried grass, and on the grass lay the figure of a girl bound hand and foot. There was no longer any doubt as to the meaning of the speech to which they had listened, for close to the pyre stood the native and in his hand he held a flaming torch, and the boys knew that he was about to set fire to the grass. Straight toward him they moved. The native hesitated but an instant and then, dropping the torch, fled screaming with fright.

The man had been holding his torch high above his head and as he dropped it the flame brushed the dried grass on which the girl lay, and instantly the pyre was a blazing holocaust. With a low cry of alarm Bill leaped to the pile and, heedless of the burning grass, snatched the girl from the pyre. She was clothed in a dirty dress of some light material and the fire had caught it in several places, but Bill quickly smothered it. Meanwhile she had uttered

no sound and the boys saw that she was unconscious and at first they feared that they had come too late. But Bill quickly found that her heart was beating, though faintly.

"She's fainted," he whispered. "Quick now, let's make our get-away before they get onto us."

The crowd of savages were huddled back, uttering low cries of fear, and none sought to stop them as they walked with all the dignity they could muster through their midst, Bill carrying the girl in his arms.

"Gee, but we were just in time," Fred whispered as they passed the first of the huts.

"But we aren't out of the woods yet," Bill flung back.

"You think they'll follow us?"

"I'm afraid of it. They were scared all right, but they may get over it."

"I guess it'll hold 'em long enough for us to get back," Fred gave as his opinion.

"I hope so, but we must make it snappy."

"How about taking these things off? We could make better time without them."

"No, I think we'd better hang onto them. They may come in handy again."

They were hurrying as rapidly as the sheets would permit and had reached the last of the huts

when they heard a thud, and by the light afforded by the moon, saw a boomerang fall to the ground after hitting a tree just ahead of them.

"Pretty close that," Fred cried.

"Got your gun in your hand?" Bill asked without slowing up his pace.

"Sure. Shall I fire back?"

"Not yet."

Bill was running now, although the sheet greatly hampered his movements, and every moment he expected that one or the other of them would be brought down from behind with a blow from a boomerang. But they reached the point where the trail turned to the right and entered the forest without hearing anything more from the man who had hurled the club.

"Perhaps it was the only one he had," Bill called back to Fred, who was close behind him.

"I reckon. Let me carry her a bit."

"She doesn't weigh anything. Think they're after us?"

"Sounds kind of suspicious."

"If we have to shoot now, we must shoot to kill," Bill said grimly.

They had not paused while talking and were now well down the trail and making good time. But fierce shouts could be heard from the direction of

the village and they feared that the natives had recovered from their fright and concluded that they had been fooled. And a few minutes later the suspicion became a certainty, for they could hear plainly the sounds of pursuit. But they sped on, never stopping, and had covered more than half the distance through the woods before they were sure that their pursuers were gaining on them.

"We'd better get these sheets off," Bill panted as he came to a halt so abruptly that Fred all but ran into him. "I reckon they'll not protect us now."

"You bet," Fred agreed, and they tore the still luminous garments off as quickly as possible. Bill was aware now that the girl was coming out of her stupor, but he had no time to even speak to her as it was plain that the natives were gaining rapidly and were even then but a short distance behind. But, freed from the hindrance of the sheets, they could run much faster, and for a moment it seemed that they were at least holding their own. But before long they could hear the patter of many bare feet and knew that they were gaining.

"If you get sight of any of them, shoot, and don't be afraid of hitting 'em," Bill threw over his shoulder, and a moment later a shot rang out, followed by a cry of pain.

"Got one of 'em," Fred panted close at Bill's heels.

Evidently the shot had the desired effect on the band, for they halted for at least a minute, allowing the boys to gain a considerable distance. But it was not long before they heard them coming on again, and just as they reached the edge of the woods Fred fired another shot.

Gordon had, of course, heard the shots, and as they emerged into the bright moonlight they saw that he had the elevator spinning only a few feet ahead. But they had no time to spare, for even as Bill lifted the girl into the back compartment the mob burst from the forest and with wild yells of rage dashed toward the plane. But before they could reach it the *Albatross* rose into the air and once more, for the time being, they were safe.

"Thank God you made it," Gordon sighed as he started the forward motor. "But never ask me to stay behind again. I wouldn't live over the past hour for all the money in the world."

"I know how you felt, son, but it was the only way," Bill told him, giving him a pat on the back. Then, turning to Fred, who was holding the girl in his arms in the rear, he asked: "How is she?"

"I'm all right now," the girl answered for her-

self, but in a voice so weak that he could hardly catch the words.

"That's fine," Bill told her. "You are safe now and you mustn't talk any, just rest."

By this time the plane was headed back toward the mine and in a few minutes it settled down in front of the shack. To their surprise they found Umbago sitting up, and the giant grunted his pleasure as they brought the girl in and laid her down on the grass bed.

"Now, then, we've got to get away from here in a hurry," Bill told them.

"How come?" Fred asked.

"Why, that mob of natives will be here as soon as their legs will carry them, won't they?"

"Gee, that's so. I hadn't thought of that, but we've got plenty of time. They can't get here for some time, you know."

"I know that, but we can't all get away at once, because the plane'll not take us all."

"Another thing I didn't think of," Fred acknowledged. "But where will we go?"

"It doesn't make much difference, just so it's far enough away," Bill told him. "Now my plan is this: I'll take Umbago and leave you three here, and then I'll come back. I won't be gone more than

a half hour, and they can't possibly get here in that time."

"But you can't get him out of the plane by yourself," Gordon objected.

"I guess he's strong enough to help himself now," Bill said as he motioned to the giant.

The man got slowly and painfully to his feet and, following Bill's gesture, walked toward the plane. Bill knew that the native must be suffering at every step, but he also knew that what he had planned had to be done. So he indicated by gestures that he was to climb over the side of the cockpit, and, from the grunts and gestures of the native, he believed that he already understood his plan. At any rate he obeyed and finally succeeded in accomplishing the seemingly impossible feat.

Bill lost no time, but started at once, heading toward the northeast, and he put on full power and was soon making a hundred and seventy miles an hour. For ten minutes he kept the speed and then, seeing what looked like a good place to land just ahead, he shut off the power and a moment later brought the plane down beside a small stream which trickled between lofty hills. Quickly he motioned the giant to get out, and with much painful grunting the native obeyed. Then Bill pointed back the way they had come, and again to himself, trying to

make him understand that he was going back for the others. Evidently the man caught his idea, for he grunted and nodded his head as he sat down near the brook.

Everything seemed to be going well with his plans until he was about half-way back, and then without the least warning the motor stopped. Almost instinctively Bill switched on the elevator and, as the momentum of the plan carried it forward, adjusted its speed until he was suspended practically motionless in the air and about six hundred feet from the earth. What could have happened he had no idea, but at once set to work to find the trouble. From the suddenness of the thing he knew it could not have been due to a defective cell, and his first act was to look to the wiring. This took some time and he could find nothing wrong with it, every joint seemed to be in perfect condition and he could locate no break.

So he turned his attention to the brushes of the motor, carefully removing them with the aid of a small screw driver. But, so far as he could see, they were in perfect condition. And all the time he knew that a frenzied mob of savages were hastening toward the mine, and he began to get extremely anxious and for a half hour tried first one thing and then another. But with no result. Everything

seemed to be in perfect condition, but the motor was dead. He even tried a new cell, but without result.

Then despair almost conquered him, but not quite. To lose his head now would, he told himself, be fatal, and, breathing a prayer for help, he started in all over again. For another half hour he worked desperately, trying to keep cool and to make no mistakes. And then, just as he was thinking that it was beyond him, he found it. Down behind one of the brushes was a small piece of wire nail wedged in such a way that it was causing a short circuit in the commutator. With a cry of relief he drew it out with a small pair of pliers, and in another ten minutes was ready to see if it would run. To his great joy the motor started and ran as sweetly as ever, and he headed for the mine.

Altogether he had lost nearly an hour and a half and he knew in what a state of anxiety Gordon and Fred must be. Also he realized that nearly enough time had elapsed for the natives to reach the place, and his heart was, as he afterward expressed it, in his mouth all the way back. And his fears were well founded, for as he came in sight of the location in the moonlight he saw a swiftly moving mass of men not a quarter of a mile from the shack.

"As he saw the natives coming he was almost over the site, and, shutting off the forward propel-

ler, he started the elevator and let the plane drop faster than ever he had done before. But it was a time when every second counted, for he did not doubt but that the natives had seen him and would increase their speed if such a thing were possible.

"Where in the world——"

"Never mind that now," Bill snapped. "Pile in, all of you. The natives are almost here and there's not a minute to lose."

"The natives? Why, we haven't——"

"I tell you they'll be here any minute."

And even as he spoke the first of the band burst from the trail beside the stream. But they were in the plane by this time and Gordon halted him with a shot from his automatic even as Bill started his motor.

"Gee, but this sort of thing is getting to be a habit, and sometime we're going to be just the fraction of a second too late in getting off," Gordon chuckled as the plane rose in the air, while the band of natives seemed to fill the open space below them.

"Pray God, there'll never be another time," Bill said as he turned on the other motor and headed the plane into the northeast for the second time that night.

"But where have you been?" Gordon demanded

as they left the scene behind. "Thought you were going to be back in half an hour."

"So did I, but the motor stopped soon after I had started back and it took me an hour and a half to find the trouble. And I didn't find it any too soon at that."

"I'll tell the world you didn't. But what was it?"

"Just a bit of nail, but it was where I couldn't find it till I'd gone over the whole motor about a dozen times. Believe me, it was a bad hour and a half for me."

"And don't think we were having anything that resembled a picnic," Fred declared from the back seat.

"I can easily imagine that you weren't," Bill told him as he increased the speed.

"But suppose you hadn't——"

"Cut it," Bill interrupted. "I did find it, and in time, too, and that's all we need to think about right now."

"Did Umbago get out all right?" Gordon asked.

"Sure he did. If you ask me, that's one game sport, if he is a savage."

"Wish we could take him back to Maine with us, but of course that's out of the question," Gordon sighed.

All this time the plane had been speeding swiftly

and now Bill slowed down the motor as he got his bearings and two minutes later the plane came to rest again beside the little stream. Umbago expressed his pleasure at their safety by a series of grunts, nodding his woolly head and waving his arms. He even attempted a sort of dance, but sank down exhausted after a few steps.

"It's all right, old fellow, we understand just how you feel about it," Bill said, patting him on his broad back.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

IT WAS just breaking day when they got back and for three hours they all slept on the ground except Bill who insisted on keeping watch. Shortly after seven he called them and had hot coffee and hard tack ready. It was, as he put it, rather a slim breakfast but, under the circumstances it was the best he could do as they had left the greater part of their food stuff in the shack and there had been no time to put it back in the plane.

While eating Gordon and Fred told him that they had learned that the girl's name was Mary Long and that she had been stolen by the natives about three weeks before while, with her parents, she had been on a journey from Sydney to the northern part of the island. That much they had learned from her but she still was too much confused to tell them any of the details. She said she lived in Sydney in a big house but couldn't remember the street. She was a pretty little thing and all three boys believed from

her actions as well as from her looks that she came from a family of refinement.

To their surprise Umbago seemed almost entirely recovered and the cuts on his body were healing rapidly so they did not have him to worry about. After a long consultation they decided that, although their food supply was very meager, it would be best to remain where they were for another day as they feared the savages might stay at the mine in hopes that they would return.

"Umbago will be well enough to look out for himself by tomorrow morning," Bill told them. "So we'll get an early start and go back after the gold and the rest of our grub if they've left any. Then, unless the natives are still there, we'll be all set to make Sydney before night."

The girl slept much of the day but toward night awoke and seemed to be much refreshed and clearer in her mind. But she did not seem to want to talk about her adventure and the boys did not press her deeming it better to wait until later when her strength had more fully returned.

That night the three boys took turns watching but it passed without incident except that in the morning Umbago was gone. When he went and how he left without being heard or seen by the one on guard no one could say but he was gone and, although they

waited until nearly seven o'clock, he did not return, and they never saw him again.

"I'll bet he knew that we wouldn't want to go and leave him and so he decided that he'd make it easy for us by taking French leave," Gordon suggested.

"Wouldn't wonder if you're right," Bill agreed.

So they decided not to wait any longer, and shortly after seven o'clock the plane took the air again, and headed back for the mine. There was no sign of life about the place as they circled around so as to get a view from all sides lest some of the natives might be hiding either in the shack or the bushes surrounding it. But they could see no one and finally decided to risk it though all three had their guns in their hands as the plane struck the camp. But nothing happened and they quickly dug up the gold and loaded it into the plane. Of the food they had left in the shack not a vestage remained but that did not trouble them as they expected to reach the city before nightfall.

"We really ought to have one more narrow escape from those guys before we leave," Gordon said as they finished storing the gold away.

"Cut that kind of talk," Bill ordered. "Again might well be once too often. For my part I hope I'll never see any of them again."

"Second the motion," Fred chimed in.

It was just after eight o'clock when finally the plane headed toward Sydney with Gordon at the wheel, Bill at his side and Fred and the girl in the rear seat. Mary Long was rapidly recovering her strength, and was much excited over the prospect of the long flight. Fortunately they still had a few bars of chocolate and a little hard tack in the plane so they did not have to go actually hungry though, as Gordon said, they all felt that a good square meal would be very welcome when they got to it.

The flight to the city was without incident. The day was, for a wonder, all but cloudless and not too warm and everyone, especially Mary, enjoyed the trip although, as Gordon said again, a good meal under their belts wouldn't have hurt any.

It lacked a few minutes of seven o'clock when they sighted the coast and a few minutes later the plane descended behind the Burns' house. One of the children had caught sight of it some time before it landed and the entire family, together with several of the neighbors, were out back awaiting their arrival.

"Well, well, I see you found him," was Mr. Burns' greeting as he held out both hands to the boys. "But where did you get the little girl?" he added as he caught sight of Mary.

Explanations were made while they were eating

dinner which was already on the table and Mr. Burns told them that he believed he knew the family to which Mary belonged.

"Is your father named John Long?" he asked her, and Mary nodded her head although she was too shy to speak.

"Then I know who he is," Mr. Burns declared. "He left here about six weeks ago to make the trip by auto to some place in the north and I haven't heard of his return. I'll see if I can find his name in the 'phone book," he said getting up from the table.

He returned a few minutes later with the news that the name was in the book but that the 'phone had been disconnected several weeks before and service had not been resumed.

"I'll try to get in touch with someone who knew him and can perhaps tell us how to reach him in the morning," he said. "They must be nearly crazy at the loss of as pretty a little girl as Mary and we must get word to them as soon as possible."

Of course it took the best part of the evening for the boys to tell their story and many were the exclamations of horror and of wonder as they told of their many escapes.

"I'll say you have every reason to be very thankful," Mr. Burns told them when they had at last

come to the end. "But I think you should send a cable to Fred's mother right away."

"I would like to," Fred told him.

"Then I'll start it right off and sign your name to it. What shall I say?"

"Just say that we are safe and will be home in a few days," Fred told him.

A half hour later Mr. Burns returned with the announcement that the cable was on its way and should be delivered early the next morning. "But you boys are going to stay and make us a visit before you start home I hope," he said.

"We'd like to," Bill assured him, "and it's very kind of you to want us to, but I've an idea that Fred's mother will be counting the hours after she gets that cable, don't you, sir?"

"Well, to tell the truth I suspect she will," Mr. Burns acknowledged.

"And do you think we ought to keep her waiting any longer then we can help, sir?"

"Frankly, as much as we'd like to have you stay, I don't."

"And that's about the way we feel about it," Bill told him.

"But you'll have to stay over a day to lay in provisions for your trip."

"I guess that's right," Bill agreed, "and besides,

we ought to give the plane a good looking over," he added turning to Gordon.

"Sure we must, and we'll get at it the first thing in the morning," Gordon proposed.

Being pretty well tired out they went to bed early and were up early in the morning and at work on the plane. It took the best part of three hours to give it the thorough going over which they thought was necessary, and by the time they had finished and had washed up, Mr. Burns was back from down town with the news that he had gotten into communication with Mary's parents and that they were, of course, overjoyed at knowing that she was safe as they had given her up for lost.

"They're starting for home at once but it'll be several days before they get here, but we will, of course, keep her with us until they arrive," he told them.

It took the greater part of the rest of the day provisioning the plane for the homeward trip and disposing of the gold. They had decided that it made too great a weight to take home in the plane and Mr. Burns assured them that the bank, of which he was a director, would take it and, after disposing of it, credit Fred with the amount, and they decided to take advantage of his offer. At the bank

Fred was assured that it would amount to nearly if not quite fifty thousand dollars.

At seven o'clock the following morning they bade their friends farewell and a few minutes the *Albatross* was out over the open sea headed for the States and home.

"One good thing about it is that we'll miss having a fuss made over us when Mary's folks get back," Gordon declared as he turned for a last look at the vanishing land.

"That would have been a bore," Bill assured him. "But I'm mighty glad we got her away from those savages."

All through the day the motor worked without a miss and by dark they had covered nearly two thousand miles. The weather had been perfect but as night came on a low lying bank of clouds ahead gave promise of a change and the boys felt a bit uneasy as darkness enveloped them.

"Afraid we're going to run into a storm before morning," Bill declared as he changed places with Gordon.

"Does look kind of mucky," Gordon agreed, "but I guess we can go over it."

"You mean that?" Fred asked, a note of alarm in his voice.

"Sure, why not?"

"But don't storms reach up an awful distance?"

"Some do and some don't," Bill told him. "But you can usually get over them by going up a mile or so."

By nine o'clock their speed had slowed down nearly thirty miles an hour and, as they were running on the same notch as before, they knew that the wind was rising and that it was against them.

"Better get her up a bit," Bill advised.

No stars could be seen as Gordon nosed the plane upward, and it was evident that the wind was rapidly increasing in strength, and at an altitude of six thousand feet their speed had dropped to less than a hundred miles an hour.

"Is—is there any danger?" Fred asked.

"I suppose there's always danger up in the air," Bill told him. "But I guess we'll be all right."

At eight thousand feet stars appeared and the wind had decreased considerably, and both boys felt better. Down below them it was as black as ink and jagged streaks of lightning now and then tore their way through the blackness, while the deep rumble of thunder was almost incessant.

"Do you think we're going to get over it?" Fred asked.

"Why, we are over it," Bill told him. "Can't you see it down below there?"

"I—I guess I could if I looked, but I—well, I guess I'm too much of a coward," Fred stammered.

"Coward nothing," Gordon snapped. "The first time I was up in a storm I was scared pink, and I don't mean maybe."

An hour later and the storm had passed and they brought the plane down to a lower level and again hit a hundred and seventy miles an hour.

"Let's hope that's the last exciting event that will take place on this trip," Bill sighed as he settled himself for a nap.

"I think we've had enough for one trip myself," Gordon assured him.

"And I'll bet my hair is snow white," Fred added.

Bill's wish was destined to be gratified, for the rest of the trip home was uneventful. Good weather and favorable winds enabled them to maintain their velocity and the motor behaved perfectly. Soon after one o'clock the next afternoon they sighted the coast of the United States, and shortly before ten the next morning Bill brought the plane down in front of the hangar at home.

No one was there to greet them, but as they rushed into the house Mrs. Hunniwell and Mrs. Green nearly hugged them to death, as Gordon gasped when he was released. Mr. Hunniwell had

gone to his office and Bill called him on the 'phone and received his congratulation over the wire.

Of course the best part of the rest of the day was spent in telling the story, which the boys softened in many places out of regard for their mothers' feelings. The news that Fred was now a comparatively rich man, of course, brought much joy to his mother, but this joy was small in comparison to what she felt at getting her boy back home safe and sound.

"And I'm going to make up for all the trouble and worry I've caused you," Fred declared as he again threw his arms about her neck.

THE END.

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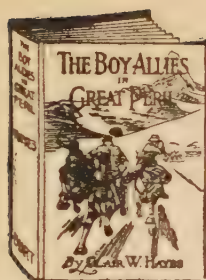
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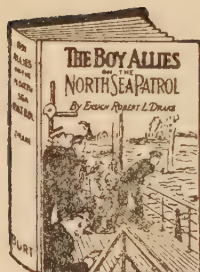
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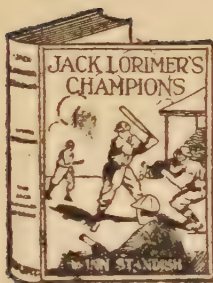
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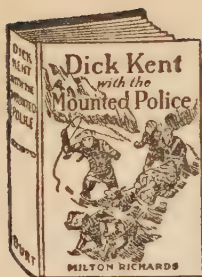
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